

# Nar's Universe

## Part 1: Dani's story

### Simple life

Finally, Dani was down with all her work at home for the day. No more dishes to wash or floors to sweep. She had 2 hours before supper for herself, so she ran down the hill. It was one of those hot summer afternoons in which the sun was so intense as it wanted to kill everyone and everything. Every breath intake was a struggle, it was like hot glasses spreading inside her lungs, but she didn't stop. Her goal was the river, where she could enjoy the cold water, swimming or sitings down with her feet in the water. It was the only place where she was free, and where nobody could tell her what work was needed to be done next. People from the village didn't like the riverside. Elderly people believe that demons and evil spirits like the water and the river is not a safe place for humans. The young people try to stay far away from the river because they didn't like the mosquitoes and all other insects. Dani didn't mind the bugs. Their sounds remind her of the end of each season celebrations, in which everyone from the village was gathering around a campfire, singing and dancing all night. It was a way for the mortal humans to show their gratitude to the Gods for dying of the old season and the rebirth of the new one. So, for Dani, the bussing was like a song that the insects were singing only for her. She also didn't mind the round and pink mosquitoes' bites because they reminded her that sometimes she had this freedom and had something to look forward in her life.

The river was near. Only few more minutes and she will be there and get rid of all her dirty clothes, including the awful skirt that her mum was making her wear every day. Soon, she will be swimming just because it was her decision, no one else. She saw a moment with her left eye, but she didn't stop. She wasn't worried about snakes, most of them minded their own business, and none liked to interact with humans. Her father told her that the snakes are more scared of her than she is of them. In any case, the river site was always full of snakes, which was why the village's children didn't like to play near the water and being surrounded by those nasty legless creatures.

She could almost hear the river running down the hill. The smell was increasing, the unpleasant smell of still water. The flat riverbanks were always smelling like this during this time of the year. The rain was scarce during summer, so stretches of the river were almost dried. Once, she found a tiny fish trapped in 1 pool of water cut from the main river course. She knew that the pool would dry in 2 or 3 days, and the fish will die. She could catch it when the water is low and transfer it to the river, saving it. But who is she to play a God. The elders were always saying that the Gods didn't like humans to interfere with the wild animals. The forest ground was sacred, including all animals inside. People didn't have the right to change wild nature. The Gods gave humans all animals necessary to survive, from sheep and goats to pigs, so they should not touch what is around them. So, she watched day after day the pool getting smaller and smaller, and one day, when she came to the spot, the fish was gone. She knew that probably some animal came and had it for lunch, but sometimes she wanted to think that maybe one of the Gods had pity over the small animal and decided to carry it to the river. She wanted to believe that the Gods were fair and not evil, and they will help anyone, even a tiny trapped fish.

Dani was almost at her favourite spot. A part of the river where the meander was vast, the water was running slowly, and there were a lot of shallow places where she could sit. It was the perfect place to float and to give her muscles the desired break. The air around her was getting cooler, and she could breathe without feeling the scratching of the dried air inside her lungs. Finally, she was at the river bench. Slowly she removed her shoes to feel the sand under her feet. The sand was warm, almost burning. She took a deep breath in and out, in and out, letting the burning sensation under her feet slowly grow. When she wasn't able to withstand the pain anymore, she ran unto the water. Oh, sweet,

sweet sensation of cold water. It was a paradise, a paradise only for her. If she could stay there forever and never leave, that would be so sweet. But for now, she only had spare moments there. Dani went back to the sand and slowly took her clothes. She knew that if she got them wet, her ears we'll ringing for days with her mom's voice. She folded them neatly and placed them on a dry patch of sand. For a moment, she just enjoyed the hot air running through her skin. It was time for a swim. She welcomed the cold water, washing away the dirt accumulated after the long days working in the kitchen.

She swam as fast as she could and until every muscle in her legs and arms were hurting. Then she decided that she would take a nap on the sand. She put her curly dump hair under her head as a pillow. It wasn't the most comfortable position, but she had slept in worse places. Two summers ago, she slept outside, not even in the barn where she could use the hay as a comfortable bed. She slept on the cold ground of her house backyard for 13 days. Her mother had found a husband for her eldest sister, Darm, from a nearby village. All the groom's family had come to commemorate the wedding. It was one of the most miserable times of her life. Even before the wedding party arrived, Dani spent all week cleaning and scrubbing all the parts of the house. It was Darm's wedding, so she wasn't allowed to touch anything. Her sister spent the week just sitting on a chair in her room. Her hands should have perfect nails and skin for her future husband. So, Dani cleaned every dusty corner and scrubbed all the cooking pans until her fingers started to bleed. No one of the boys helped. It was not their job. They had much to do in the fields. The family was supposed to be presented as clean and rich as possible, with a clean house and fields full of crops and vegetables. So, when the time came for the sons to marry, they could find suitable wives. Darm's future husband's parents, aunt and uncles were placed inside the house in the three available rooms. All the groom's siblings were placed to sleep in the barn. Dani's mother, father, and the bride were sleeping in the kitchen to serve the guest whenever necessary. Dani and her brothers were placed in the backyard, and they didn't even have good blankets to keep them warm during the chilly nights. Every night they fell asleep cold and awake with every limb frozen. The worst part of the wedding situation was that her sister was leaving the house forever, abandoning Dani to do not only her chores but her sister's too. It was a miserable life being the only girl in a family of 10. But with each passing year, the work started to grow smaller. Two of her brothers married and built houses for their new families on the other side of the village. Moreover, two more of her brothers will leave the family home until the end of this winter.

The sun started to go down, reminding her that she must go soon. Dani went to the water and tried to wash the sand from her body and hair. This was a challenge; her thick and curly hair was retaining even the tiny grains of sand. With patience, she managed to remove almost all sand, combing it with her fingers. It took her some time to undo all the knots. When she was happy with her work, she braided her hair and put on her clothes. She decided against putting on her shoes. The ground was cold enough so that she could walk without them. She took a last glance at the river bench and started walking slowly towards her house. She wasn't out of the sand yet, when her eyes caught a movement. It was a small brown rabbit. Her instinct told her to stop immediately. It was so strange; due to the snakes, most of the animals were not daring to go near this part of the river, yet this one decided to jump around. Was the rabbit sick or just had a death wish? She would understand if it was the latter thing. Sometimes at night, before bed, when she couldn't go to the river for days or weeks, she also felt tired of living. Her thoughts were always scaping around the possibility of closing her eyes and not waking up in the morning. But this feeling disappeared whenever she was at the river or eating a blueberry pie. So, her life wasn't so bad after all. She didn't dare to breathe in case even the slightest movement scares the rabbit. Rarely did the Gods give her the opportunity to see such a fluffy animal. The rabbit had long ears that were almost transparent. Its whiskers were long and black, almost the same colour as its nose. The animal's small dark eyes were fixed at her. "That was it; the rabbit will run", she thought. But against all animal's instincts, the rabbit just looked at her for a minute and calmly started jumping up the river. It was such an odd situation. Dani didn't even think twice before starting to walk after it. But for her frustration, she lost it after several minutes. With a big disappointment, she's turned back towards her home.

The sand under her feet was starting to get cold. She contemplated putting on her shoes now or waiting until the grass. She knew that if she waited, she would be cold soon, but she enjoyed the sensation of walking first on the sand, afterwards on the moss and finally on the grass. She decided that in case she got too cold, a run to her family home was an excellent option to warm up. Walking on the moss after walking on the sand was such a weird sensation. It was like walking on feathers but even better. The sun was slowly going down behind the hill, reminding her that she must hurry or she would be home after dark. Suddenly, she felt something solid under her right foot. A thick layer of moss was supposed to cover the white stone that predominated the area around her village. Curiosity overtook her, and she started removing the thin layer of moss. After her job was done, she saw a square stone as dark as the night sky. It definitely didn't belong to the area. It was as big as her arm and had some engraving over it. The stone reminded her of the altar of the Winter God. It was getting dark, and she needed to go home, so she decided to come back the next time she was on the river and try to read the symbols that were engraved so she could see to whom God it belonged. That night she was late for supper, but even though her mum reprimanded her for that, Dani did not notice because her thoughts were about the strange altar.

Seven nights passed before Dani managed to go down to the river again. She took a quick swim and decided to sit down on a rock with feet into the water and dry under the sun. Although the curiosity was killing her, she wanted to enjoy her last moments in the water. Autumn was coming and soon will be too cold to swim. By the sun position, she had around an hour before supper to study the altar. The stone looked even darker than before. She noticed that the shapes of four different animals were carved on each of the corners. On the left top corner, a tiny hummingbird was flying towards a flower. On the corner below the bird was a bear with fish in its mouth. On the right down corner, an owl was sitting on a thick branch of an oak tree. Finally, on the top right corner, a wolf and its 3 pups were illustrated. A big star was placed in the middle, and around the star were carved symbols that she didn't recognise. Dani couldn't find the symbol of the winter God that was a snowflake or anything similar to the sun that marked the summer God altar. She also looked for the four petals representing the spring God and the naked tree, giving its reverence to the Autumn god. The weather and the passing of the time had made most of the symbols on the square rock unreadable. She could distinguish only two of them. One was a snake eating its tail, and the other was a weird-looking lizard with a huge head showing sharp and long teeth and a tiny tail.

During the next several weeks, Dani spoke with every elderly person in the village, asking them about the symbols and forgotten Gods. None of them recognised the symbols, even Toog, the oldest of them all. He even told her that if a God was forgotten, that was for a reason, and she must not bother or talk to this God. But she felt pity over this forgotten celestial being. She wanted to know what kind of offerings this God would accept. Would it be wood or stone carvings as given to the winter God, or it needs to be a blood offering as the spring God required? Maybe it will be some fruity pie as given to the Summer God or a jug of wine that was left for the Autumn God to enjoy. She didn't want to disrespect or angry the God, but she couldn't find any clue what to offer to this mystery God. Finally, she decided that whatever she gave should be accepted because she was giving it freely. First, she would find the best-looking stone near the river as an offering. When her mum makes the first pumpkin or apple pie of the year, she will bring a piece. When her brothers' make the first wine, she will bring a jug and hopefully, at the beginning of next spring, when the Druid spills the First Blood, she would be able to take some too.

Before the first full moon of Autumn, Dani managed to go three more times to the river and each time, she selected the best-looking pebble to be given as a gift to the black squared stone God. The first one was a prismatic shape pebble, white in colour, almost transparent. It was small, almost big as her thumbnail. The second was an irregular light grey pebble with some white veins and was fitting in her hand. The third was big as her eyes, round, almost perfect circle and had the colour of a fresh-caught salmon. More than a week passed between the offering of the first and second stones. When she went

there, the first had disappeared. That was unusual. She thought that maybe it was the wind, or some animal took it for its nest. When she went to give the third one, the grey pebble was gone too. For a moment, she thought that this mysterious God had liked it so much that they took it, but this was impossible. Even her Gods were leaving the offering for the Druids to remove. They enjoyed whatever was offered in their world, leaving the cleaning for the mortal humans.

On the night of the first autumn moon, everyone in the village gathered around the stone altar of the Autumn God shaped as a naked tree. The Druid spilled the enchanted wine over the tree's roots and told the story of how Autumn God fought the Summer God, ending the endless summer, saving humanity, and bringing the rain to the human realm. When the Druid finished the tale, the bachelors from each household took a small jug of wine and placed it over the tree's branches while the rest of the villages were singing and asking the Summer God to leave peacefully this year. The rest of the night was spent around the fire, eating and drinking. Everyone that was more than 5 summers old was given a small jug of wine. The wine was representing Autumn's God blessing and gave the humans blood its redness and strength to fight all the diseases. At the first morning light, everyone started going home to rest and celebrate the first autumn day as a family. Before going home, Dani hurried to the river to give the Dark Stone God her jug of wine. She had only a few sips from it. She was small even for her age, so two or three sips would be enough to keep her blood strong. She dripped some of the wine on the four corners of the stone and placed the jug with the rest in the middle of the stone. Satisfied with her work, she went home with a lighter mind. That evening, before supper, she went to get her jug back. To her surprise, the jug was standing in the middle of the stone, empty. "Was it an animal that drank the wine, or was it the God that had?" she thought to herself. It was a pity that she would never know, at least not in this life. The day before the first snow, she finally managed to take a piece of her mum's pumpkin pie to offer this strange God. Before the end of that season, she gave the God two more offerings: wine and apple pie. The apple pie was a small piece but was one of her mum's best pies ever. Dani hoped that this last offering would be enough because the elders said that this year's winter snow would come soon and would not leave them until the first day of spring.

Something awakened Nar, the God of Wildness. It was not the usual taste of blood or animal flesh. It was a small, solid, and cold object. Eon had passed since those human mortals stopped making ritual sacrifices to Nar. The God of the wildness pondered if they should open their eyes for a tiny cold object. What Nar wanted was the taste of the worm bear blood or the tender raw meat of a deer. Nar opened one of their eyes and saw a little white, prismatic stone. The stone almost glowed in the dark surroundings of the Wildness God's realm. Who would think this was a proper gift for the mighty God of everything wild in all 10 realms? The audacity of the humans to awake Nar and not even do it properly. A long time ago, Nar had a bet with the Needam, the God of everything born, about how greedy and stupid humans can be. This would be the perfect chance to win this long-forgotten bet. Nar will wait and see what the human will offer and ask for in return. It took Nar some time to scan the minds of all alive humans and find the person giving the offerings. The God of Wildness only felt pity and sadness in the mind of the human called Dani toward them. No desire or need to ask for something, just pity. She was referring to them as The Forgotten God of the Dark Stone. Nar received two more stones from this miserable girl. Nar assessed each stone, deeming it worthy for this realm. Then one night, the girl decided to offer wine. Nar did not enjoy the taste of wine as much of the blood, but the God of Wildness could get used to it. But it was the first time the girl left the sweet pie when Nar decided that the girl was too precious to stay in her realm. The spices of the creamy part together with the crunchiness of the outer part of the pie made Nar's existence shiver. The God of the Wildness didn't need to wait long for her. The brittleness of the humans, together with the jealousy of the other Gods, will take care of it. Dani's soul will leave the human realm, and Nar will claim it before the last winter snow melts away and give permission for the new season to start.