

Immortalis

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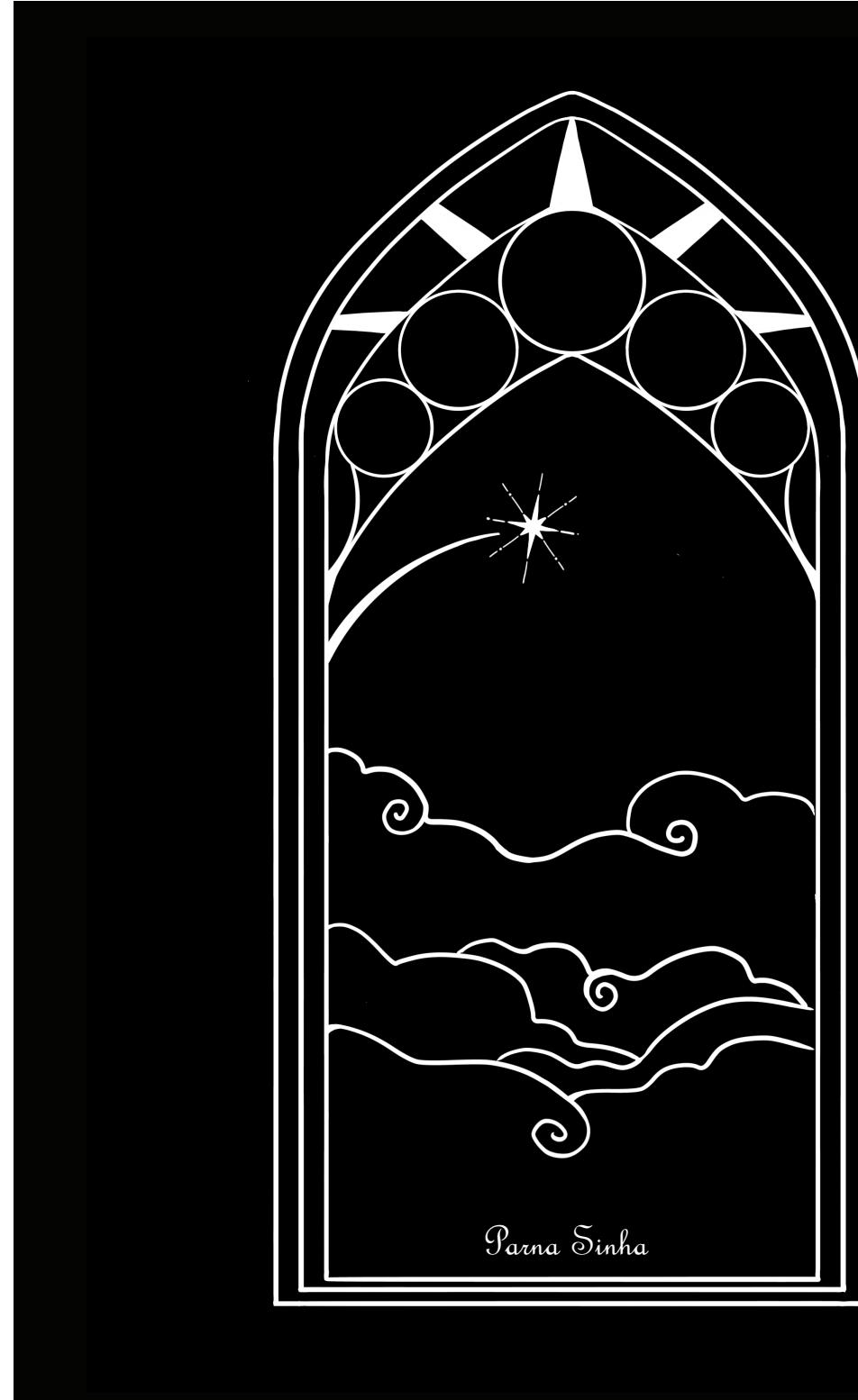
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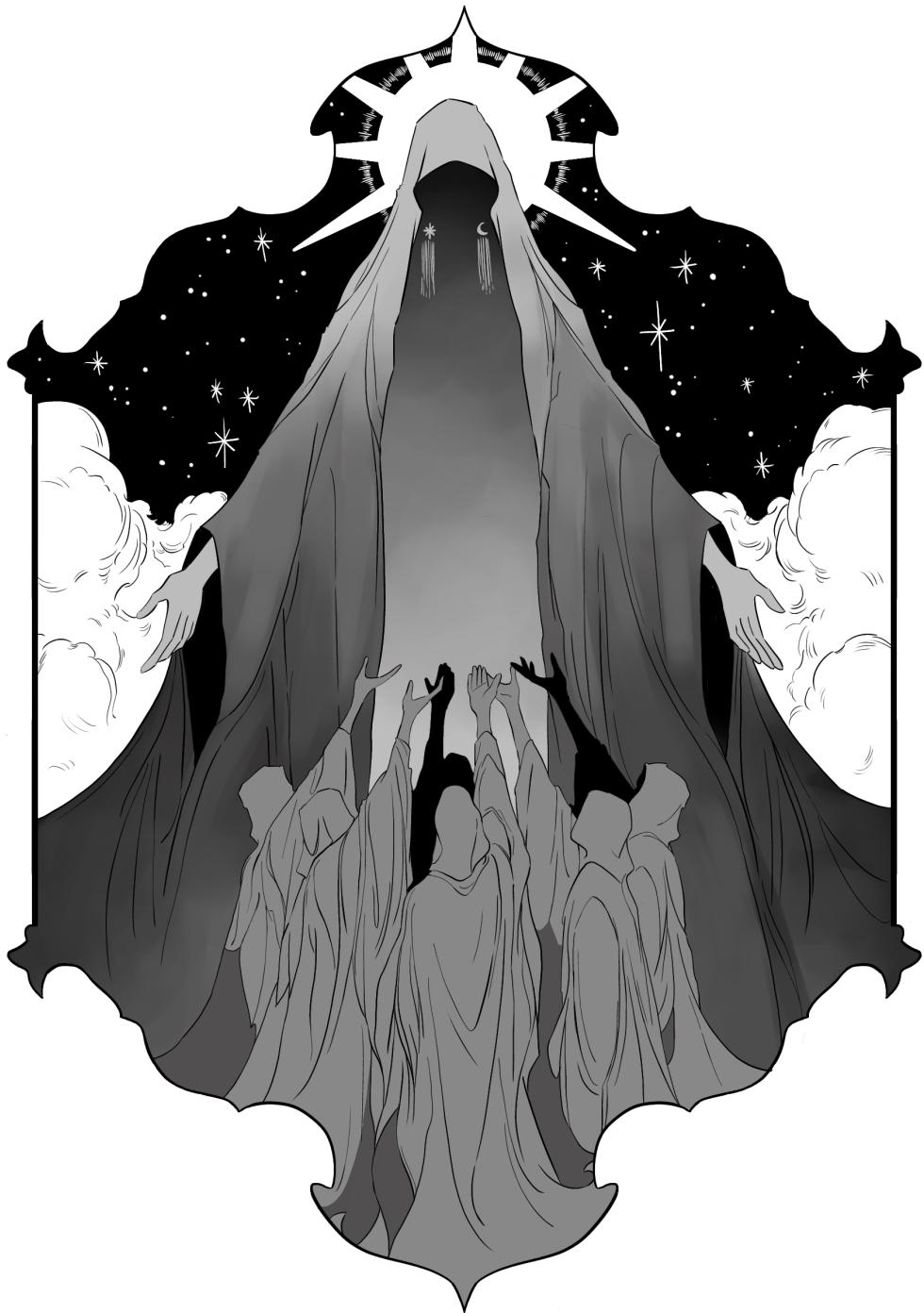
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**"The key to immortality is first living a life
worth remembering."**

— Bruce Lee



Prologue

In a world where witches have existed since the dawn of time, their presence was once a beacon of hope and guidance for humanity. Under the divinity of the great star goddess Astrea, witches protected and led humans into good health and prosperity. They were revered, their mystical powers seen as gifts from the heavens, essential for the flourishing of early civilizations. Travelling minstrels sang songs of praises of goddess Astrea and her messengers. One of these famous songs went like,

*"Astrea, star of endless grace,
In your light, we find our place,
With your wisdom, we are blessed,
In your love, we find our rest.*

*Once you gifted powers divine,
Witches flourished, stars aligned,
Through the ages, time and space,
Your protection, our embrace.*

*Even when the shadows fall,
And the world seems dark and small,
Astrea's light will always gleam,
In our hearts, a hopeful dream.*

*Goddess Astrea, forever bright,
Guide us through the darkest night,
With your love, we'll always be,
Shining stars, eternally.*

*Astrea, star of endless grace,
In your light, we find our place,
With your wisdom, we are blessed,
In your love, we find our rest.”*

However, as centuries passed, humanity’s perception of witches changed. With the advancement of civilization and the rise of new ideologies, the once-celebrated witches became entities of fear and suspicion. Their powers, once viewed as divine, were now seen as unnatural and dangerous. The growing influence of organized religion further fueled the flames of distrust, branding witches as heretics and agents of evil. Under the banner of faith and human safety, systematic persecution began. Churches and Imperial ministers set along songs with the voices of the travelling minstrels to incite fear, anger and hatred amongst the people. The once famous song now taking a dark turn. This song could be heard in every town and village.

*“In the dark night, cold and far,
Fades the light of our cursed star,
Goddess Astrea, see her plight,
Witches’ treachery brought this blight.*

*Rise up, brothers, take a stand,
Drive the witches from our land,
In Astrea’s name, we fight,
Purge the darkness, claim the light.*

*Once they claimed to heal and guide,
Now they bring the night they lied,
Cursed with hate, they sow our pain,
In their shadows, chaos reigns.*

*With torches high, we march as one,
Until the witch’s reign is done,
For our goddess, we shall fight,
Purge the darkness, claim the light.*

*Rise up, brothers, take a stand,
Drive the witches from our land,
In Astrea’s name, we fight,
Purge the darkness, claim the light.”*

Witches, whose defenses were eventually overrun, went into hiding, seeking refuge in the shadows of the world they once openly inhabited. Despite their efforts to disappear, the relentless pursuit by humans did not wane. Driven to the brink of extinction, the witches, in a desperate act of survival, retaliated with a vengeance. Villages were razed, and kingdoms brought to cinders, their fury a stark contrast to their former roles as protectors.

Goddess Astrea, witnessing the devastation wrought by the witches she had created, was consumed by anger and regret. In her sorrow, she cursed the witches with immortality—a cruel twist that would bind their fate to love. Any witch who fell in love would become

immortal, doomed to watch their beloved age and die, repeating this torment through eternity. The only escape from this endless cycle of grief was an excruciating death by fire, burning from one sunrise to the next.

The witches, realizing the gravity of Astrea's curse, adopted an ironclad rule: 'NEVER FALL IN LOVE.' Love, once a source of joy, became a perilous path leading to eternal suffering.

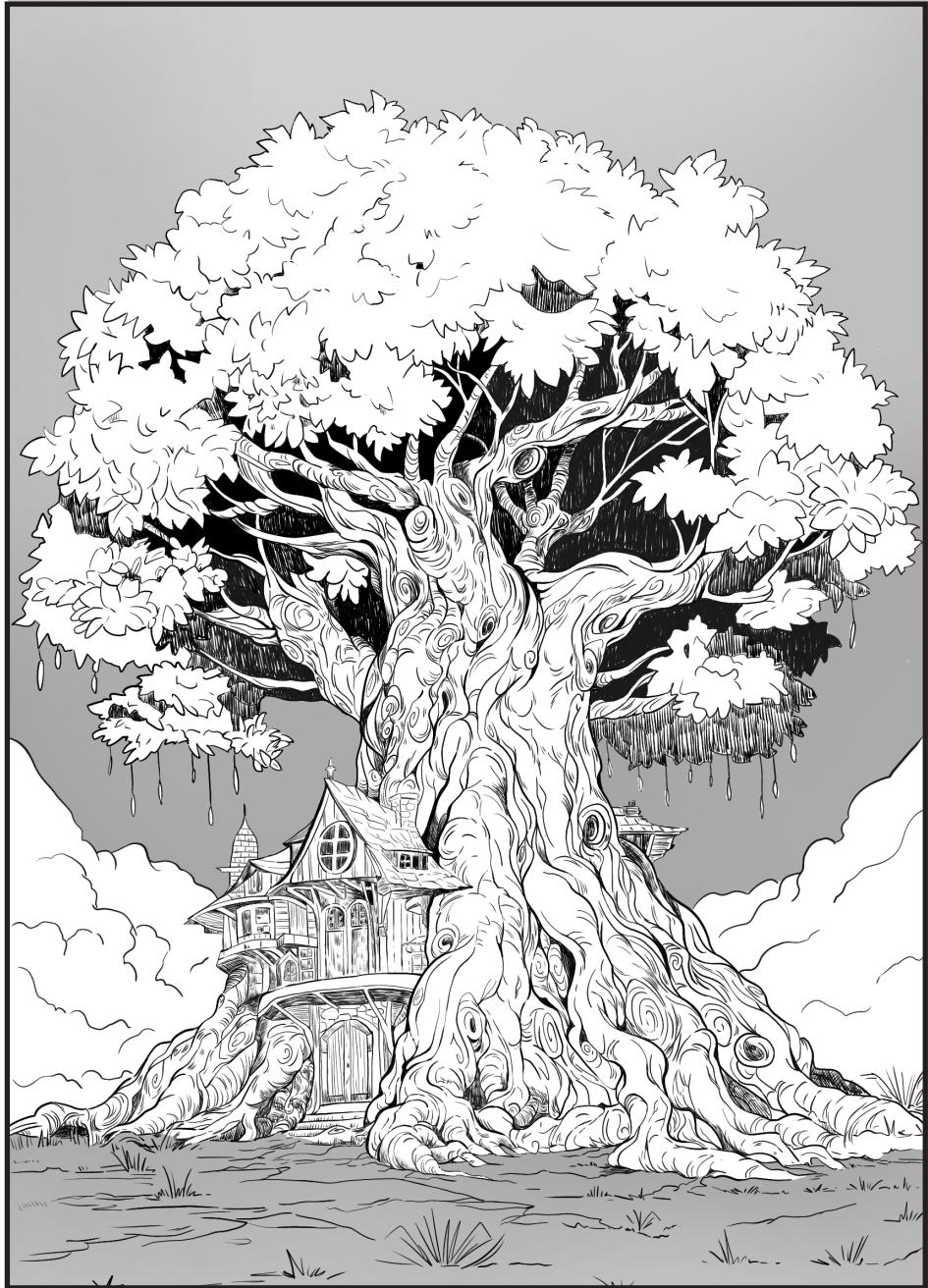
This is the story of a young witch with inquisitive eyes and an unquenchable curiosity toward the world, who dared to dream differently. She decided to set out on a journey, to find love so as to become immortal. For her, the curse was not a deterrent but an opportunity. She yearned for the endless years that immortality promised, to explore the world and its wonders without the constraints of time.

Chapter 1

Deep within the heart of the ancient forest, far from the prying eyes of the outside world, lay the hidden village of Nighthaven, a secret haven for witches. The path to this mystical enclave was nearly invisible, a narrow, winding trail overgrown with vines and moss, guarded by towering oaks and whispering willows. Only those with the keenest senses or the guidance of a resident could find their way.

Nighthaven itself was a place of enchantment, where nature and magic intertwined seamlessly. The village was a cluster of quaint cottages, their thatched roofs blending harmoniously with the surrounding greenery. Each home was adorned with herbs drying from the eaves, charms hanging from the doors, and symbols etched into the wooden frames to ward off evil and invite prosperity.

In the center of the village stood an ancient oak tree, its gnarled branches stretching skyward like protective arms. Beneath its vast canopy, a stone altar served as the focal point for rituals and gatherings. The air was perpetually fragrant with the scent of wild flowers, potions, and the faint tang of burning sage. Streams of crystal-clear water flowed through the village, their gentle babbling



providing a soothing backdrop to the daily life of the inhabitants.

The witches of Nighthaven were a diverse and vibrant community, each with their own unique talents. Some were skilled healers, their gardens overflowing with medicinal plants and their cottages filled with the heady aroma of brews and tinctures. Others were seers, historians who had survived through centuries, or communicators with animals. Over the centuries, the witches' powers had waned, and their community had become smaller, yet the village thrived. Children learned the ways of magic from an early age, their laughter and shenanigans creating a joyful ruckus.

Despite its peaceful facade, Nighthaven was well-defended. Wards and protective spells encircled the village, ensuring that only those with pure intentions could enter. The witches were always vigilant, aware of the dangers posed by the outside world where fear and superstition led to persecution.

In the evenings, the village came alive with the soft glow of lanterns and the warmth of communal fires. Stories were shared, songs sung, and knowledge passed down through the generations. The village thrived in its seclusion, a testament to the resilience and strength of its inhabitants. In this secret village lived a 16-year-old girl named Elara, a name rooted in the stars, signifying exploration. With shoulder-length red hair and inquisitive green eyes, she wasn't too tall nor too short. Dressed in simple clothes—a beige blouse with a brown ankle-length skirt cinched at the waist by a leather belt, a green and brown checkered apron around her waist, and a monocle in her breast pocket—she was popular among the witches for being too inquisitive and curious about everything. She had a hunger for knowledge, and the village was too small to contain her curiosity.

Elara wanted to explore the world, meet humans, and see the towns and cities. She had grown bored of her mundane life in the village.

She had spent her entire life there, exploring the surroundings, learning about herbs and shrubs, about medicine, food, divinity, and witchcraft, among other activities. She had lived this life for 16 years and now she wanted more.

She wanted to explore and learn everything and had soon realized that one lifespan wasn't enough to travel the entire world, so she decided to become immortal. She had read books about the origin of witches and the curse of Astrea. It was hard not knowing about it, given the ironclad rule of the witches, 'Never fall in love.' Thus, on one fine sunny morning, she broke the news to her village: "I'm going on a journey to become immortal. I'm going to learn about love, fall in love, and become immortal. Then I shall have an eternity to explore the entire world!"

This announcement caused quite a stir in the village. Witches came running from their cottages to stop her from leaving. Many pleaded with her to change her mind. They told her that she would regret it, but Elara, being a headstrong girl, decided to ignore her elders' advice, thinking, "It's been decades and centuries since they stepped foot outside the village. What do they know about the current humans? How can they understand my feelings?"

Making up her mind and saying her goodbyes to everyone, she walked out of the village, never turning back to see the home she had left behind.

Chapter 2

Towering trees with gnarled, moss-covered trunks stretched skyward, their dense canopies creating a tapestry of green that filtered the sunlight into soft, dappled patches on the forest floor. The air was cool and fragrant, filled with the earthy scent of damp leaves, rich soil, and the subtle aroma of wildflowers. Walking through the ancient forest was like stepping into a world untouched by time. Each of her footsteps was cushioned by a thick layer of fallen leaves and soft moss, muffling sounds and adding to the sense of profound stillness. The occasional rustle of small creatures in the underbrush and the distant calls of birds were the only interruptions in the hushed ambiance.

No one had trodden through this path in centuries, and now Elara was busy paving her own way through this dense forest. Ancient oaks and elms stood as silent sentinels, their branches intertwining to form natural arches overhead, giving the impression of walking through a grand, cathedral-like space.

As she ventured deeper, beams of sunlight pierced the canopy at unexpected angles, illuminating hidden groves where vibrant fungi

and delicate flowers thrived. Clear, babbling streams meandered through the landscape, their water sparkling and cool to the touch. Walking through this forest, reminded her of one the folk songs about the ancient forest. Her soft humming filled the serene atmosphere,

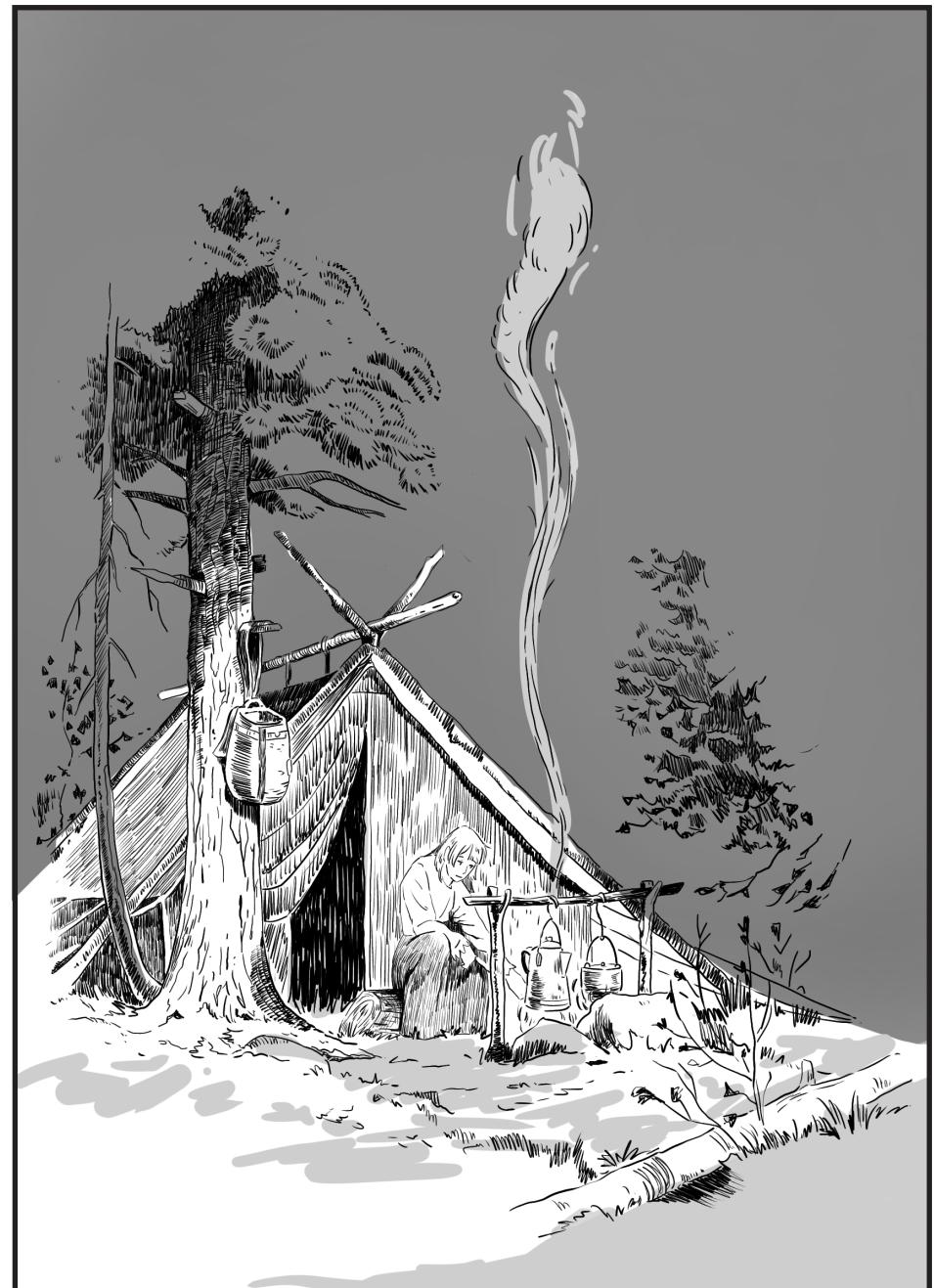
*"In the ancient woods where whispers flow,
Nature's secrets softly glow,
Pathways hidden, dreams unfold,
In the forest's green, where tales are told.*

*Cool and fragrant is the air we breathe,
With damp leaves and earth beneath,
Streams babble, cool and clear,
Whispering secrets to those who hear.*

*In the ancient woods where silence sings,
Nature's beauty, timeless, brings,
Mossy paths where none have tread,
Shading canopies where dreams are fed.*

*In the ancient woods where whispers flow,
Nature's secrets softly glow,
Pathways hidden, dreams unfold,
In the forest's green, where tales are told.*

She continued to walk through the forest, heading north. She believed that going straight north would lead her outside this untrodden ancient forest. She walked all day until the sun was about to set. Then she decided to set up camp in a small clearing of trees. With practiced hands, she set about her tasks. Stones were carefully arranged in a circle, and dry twigs and leaves were



collected as kindling from the surroundings. Soon, the crackling of the flames could be heard, flickering light against the ancient trees.

Nearby trees provided spots for hanging the bags. Fallen lags and branches were used to prop up the tent. A fallen tree was used as seat. Under the tent, soft moss and large leaves were spread to act as bedding. A nearby stream offered fresh water, its gentle babbling a soothing backdrop.

For dinner, she ventured into the forest, returning with pockets full of wild berries and fragrant herbs. The berries, plump and sweet, were a treat after an entire day of walking. Then she prepared a pot of wild herb soup over the fire. Handfuls of freshly picked herbs, roots, and greens simmered in the iron cauldron, releasing a savory aroma that mingled with the earthy scents of the forest.

As darkness enveloped the camp, she sat near the fire, with a bowl of steaming soup warming her hands, the wild berries providing a sweet finish to her simple but hearty meal.

The next morning she woke up to the chirping of birds and the rays of the warm sun shining on her face through the makeshift tent. She walked to the nearby stream, washed her face, ate a few fruits she had brought from home, and set off again towards the distant north.

This continued for a few more days. She was starting to lose hope. She had been walking and walking, without any trail, but had still not reached the edge of this grand ancient forest. She wondered, "Am I even going in the right direction? Does this forest ever end? What if there is nothing towards the north? Should I turn back and go home?" All these questions started to sow seeds of doubt in her young heart, but her stubbornness and pride refused to let her turn back. She marched forward.

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That's when she came across a strange sight. Leaning against a tree was a figure. What was it? Its silhouette looked familiar, almost like that of a person. As she inched closer, a clear outline started to form through the leaves and bushes. It was a boy! It was the first human she had ever come across in her life! She was excited. "I must be near a human village now," she thought. She ran towards him, throwing caution to the wind. As she reached out to the boy leaning against the tree, she saw numerous wounds on his body.

He was bleeding, his breathing heavy. Until now, all she had seen were minor scrapes and bruises, sometimes a broken wrist or ankle in the witches' village. She had never witnessed slash wounds like this. But before her mind could fully grasp the situation, her body was already moving. She reached into her bag, bringing out a mortar and pestle, a leather pouch with clean water, and some clean pieces of fabric that could be used to tie the wounds and stop the bleeding. She opened her waist pouch and procured the yarrow leaves she had gathered along her journey. She crushed the yarrow leaves with some water in the mortar to create a thick, gooey paste. Then, using her pocket knife, she cut the fabric into thin strips. Once the preparation was finished, she removed his shirt. She cleaned and disinfected his wounds with strong concentrated alcohol and then applied the paste of yarrow leaves. Luckily, none of his wounds were deep enough to require stitching. She then tightly wrapped those wounds with the fabric to stop the bleeding.

She looked at the boy. He had soft hazel hair that formed little waves on his head. He looked around the same age as her, maybe a year or two younger. She wondered what color his eyes would be. His face was now at ease, his chest rising and falling in rhythmic movement. He was breathing easier. The worst was over. He wouldn't die of blood loss. Once that registered, her legs gave out as her back slid down against the tree. She let out a sigh of relief. He was safe. She had saved him. Her journey to acquire knowledge was not in vain. Knowledge can help people. It can save lives. Her knowledge from the plethora of books she had read in the witches' library had just saved a life.

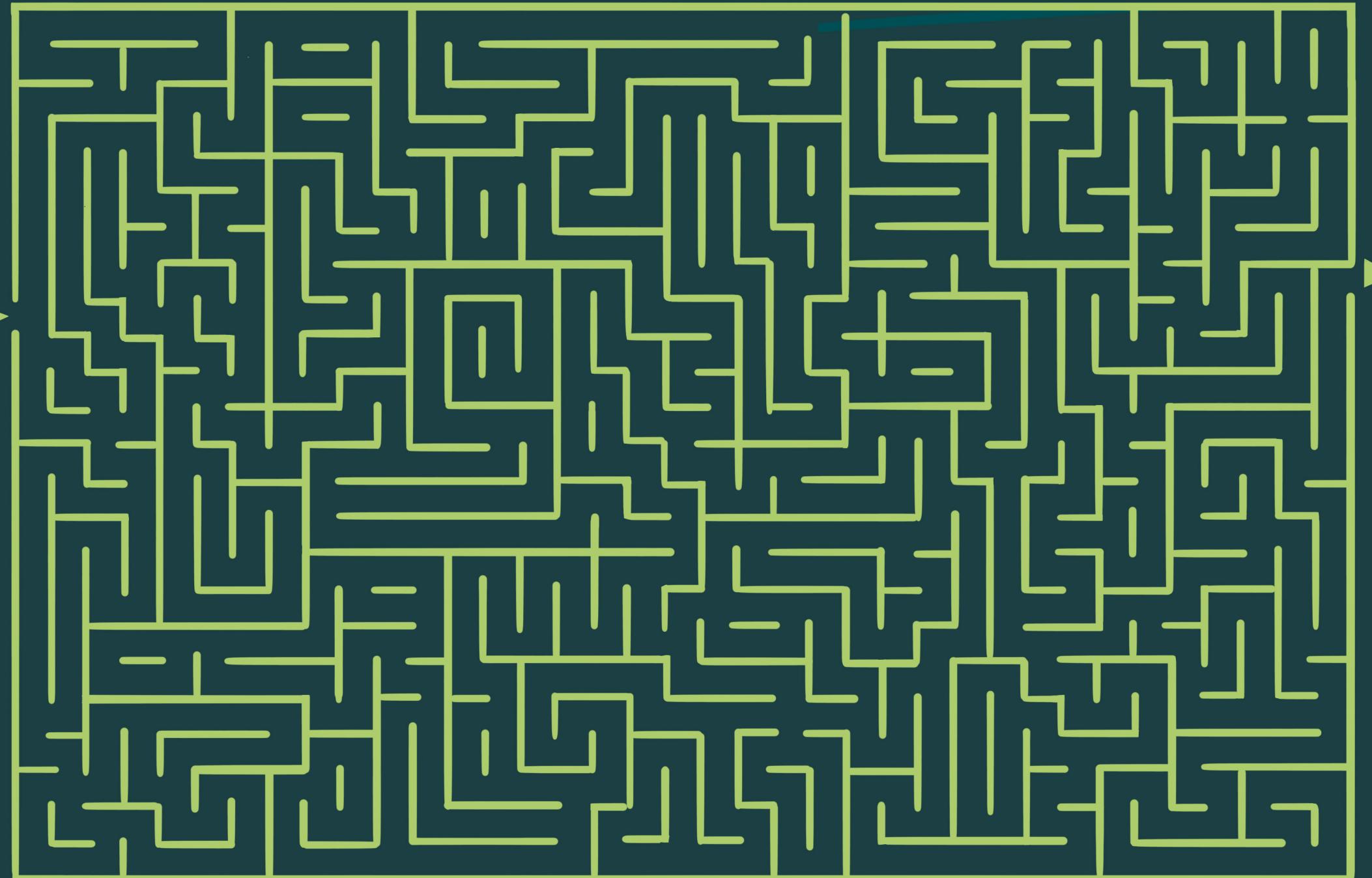


Chapter 3

The sun was about to set by the time she had finished the first aid, and unable to leave the boy by himself, she decided to set up camp. She ate a simple meal of vegetable stew and stale bread and then wrapped herself and him in the thick tent fabric before drifting off to sleep.

The next morning, she woke up to the chirping of birds. She checked on his condition, and it definitely looked better. She hoped he would wake up soon, and her wishes were answered by the afternoon.

He stirred awake. His groans of pain alerted her that he was conscious. She rushed to him. He looked confused and disgruntled. She filled him in on how she had found him and his current condition. After he had calmed down and grasped the situation, he thanked her with heartfelt gratitude. Before he could speak more, she bombarded him with questions she had been dying to ask, "Is there a village nearby? How long will it take to get there? Is there a trail that leads to the outside?" Taken aback, he pondered her questions for a few moments before answering, "Yes, there is a town nearby. It will take around two days on foot to get there, and if you go a few miles ahead, you can find a trail that leads to the town."



"Two days!" she exclaimed. She was excited yet disheartened that it was still so far off. "Isn't there some place closer?"

"Unfortunately not. There used to be a small village just half a day's walk from here, but it was ambushed by bandits yesterday, and everything was burned to the ground. Some managed to escape, while all the others were killed. I barely managed to escape into the forest by going off the trail. So again, I can't thank you enough for saving me, Miss..."

It suddenly dawned on both of them that, in the spur of the moment, they had forgotten to introduce themselves. This silly blunder made them burst out into laughter, but the pain from his wounds soon turned the laughter into groans. The boy introduced himself as Evander, 15 years old, meaning "a man with loyalty and a noble heart." He was a hard-working errand boy in the village where he had grown up. His brown eyes shone like gold in the morning sun. Elara carefully chose her words and introduced herself as a traveler who wanted to learn more about the world and had just left her home to start her journey. She had thought plenty about what her fake origins should be to avoid revealing herself as a witch and ending up on the stake.

She decided to stay another day in the same spot to help him recover a bit more before they headed out on their paths. The night passed, and the morning came. She said goodbye to Evander and resumed her journey.

After walking for a few minutes, Elara realized she was being followed. She could hear the rustling of leaves and the snapping of twigs behind her. She turned around to see Evander struggling to keep up with her pace. "Why are you following me? We agreed to go our separate ways," she said angrily. "That is exactly what I'm doing. It just so happens that I was heading towards the same town.

I'm not following you; I'm just taking the shortest route," he replied casually. Unable to argue with his logic, she sighed and slowed down her pace to keep up with him.

Elara was someone who kept quiet while walking, observing her surroundings. In contrast, Evander was very talkative. He kept on asking Elara questions about where she was from, who her parents were, what she liked, and what she didn't—a million questions to the point she felt as if she was being interrogated like a criminal. She was scared that she had blown her cover as a witch and that he was following her and asking so many questions so he could turn her in. But once he saw Elara withdrawing from him with an annoyed yet scared look on her face, he realized he had made her uncomfortable. He apologized and changed the subject to himself. He talked about his work in the village, stories about the people, legends he had heard, and plenty of other things. After that, he never brought up questions about her past.

This continued until they were finally out of the forest. Once outside, they finally found a proper trail—a trail that had been made through walking and traveling carts over the decades. By then, both Evander and Elara had come to understand each other a little better. They continued walking, following the trail. Soon, smoke could be seen in the sky, and as they got closer and closer to the town, spiral towers, little chimneys, and colored thatched roofs came into view. They were finally there. The first town of her journey. The town known as Archopolis. What a fitting name for her first human town. Archopolis could easily be translated to "beginning of a journey" or "the town of beginnings." This town would be her first step towards immortality, her first step towards finding love.

ARCHOPOLIS



Chapter 4

She entered through the large town gate and was immediately overwhelmed by the sprawling expanse of bustling streets. The noise of vendors, children running around, soldiers marching, and the savory smells of various foods filled her senses. This was the first time Elara had witnessed such a vibrant scene. A small tap on her shoulder broke her focus, and she turned around to see Evander standing behind her.

"Why are you still here? You should leave. Don't you have work to do?" Elara asked, brushing off his hand. Evander looked dejected and said goodbye before walking away. Elara took her time strolling through the bustling town, observing armor shops, food stalls, peddlers selling trinkets, tarot card readers, and even some drunk soldiers whining about their work. The new sights filled her with curiosity. This was exactly what she had left the village for.

She ran into an armor shop, where she eagerly examined various breastplates, leather covers, gauntlets, and shin guards lining the shelves. A few moments later, a middle-aged, burly man with balding hair and a red beard appeared at the counter. In a gruff voice

he addressed the young girl in his shop, "What type of armour are you looking for, and what is your budget, little girl?"

With curiosity bubbling over, Elara briskly walked toward the shopkeeper and started bombarding him with questions. "Sir, what type of leather is that armor made of? How does this hold its shape? How are the pieces put together? Who makes the chainmail? How heavy is a full armor set? How long does it take to make?"—and a million other questions.

The bearded shopkeeper laughed at her enthusiasm and said, "Girl, if you want to know so much, you'd better bring some money and buy one of my items. If you do, I'll answer any 10 of your bazillion questions. Deal?" Elara looked disappointed at not being able to get any answers, but at least she knew he wasn't completely against talking. She asked for the price of the cheapest item and left the shop. She had no way of knowing if the price he had given was actually cheap or what the value of money was. She understood the concept of money and its importance in trade but had no means of earning it.

Leaving the shop, she hoped to learn something new that wouldn't cost her. That's when she came across a peddler selling trinkets and charms. She started asking questions about each item, which annoyed the peddler, who ended up shooing her away.

Next, she walked into a bookstore, where she felt like reading every book on the shelves. However, the store clerk threw her out, saying that customers who weren't going to buy anything weren't welcome. She soon realized that no shopkeeper would entertain her questions without payment. It felt unfair—knowledge shouldn't have a price, she thought. But then again, they were running a business to make a living and couldn't afford to cater to random strangers. Both sides made sense to her, but it also made her feel helpless.

Dejected, she started walking around town, trying to find an inn that would let her stay for a few nights and allow her to pay afterward since she had no money. One by one, she was rejected by the inns. She wondered if she would have to spend her first night in town on the streets. Was it even safe to sleep outside? As her mind drifted, she suddenly remembered Evander. What was he doing? Was he safe? Had he already found an inn or perhaps had family here? Did he already forget about her? Thinking about these questions made her feel very lonely, a feeling she had never experienced before and couldn't quite understand.

While wistfully staring into the distance, she saw someone running toward her. Elara tensed up, ready to run if it was a thief, but to her surprise, it was Evander! "What are you doing here? It's getting late. You shouldn't be out running. You're still recovering!" she exclaimed, walking briskly toward him. She felt a warm, fuzzy sensation in her chest—just moments ago, her chest had felt tight, almost as if someone was squeezing her breath away. She was glad to see him, relieved even.

Grinning sheepishly, he admitted that he had been asking around town to find her after reporting the bandit attack in his village to the town guard. He wanted to continue traveling with her. She seemed unconvinced, so he poured his heart out. "I really do want to travel with you. I have no place to call home anymore and nowhere else to go. Until now, I've only traveled to nearby towns or villages but never left the country. Listening to you speak about the wondrous sights and your love for learning has piqued my interest in the unknown as well. Lastly, I want to repay the debt I owe you for saving my life."

Still a bit hesitant, she agreed. He jumped with joy before grimacing from the pain. She burst into laughter at his foolish attempts to jump. "Now then, shall we head to an inn, milady?" he

said, mimicking a gentleman.

Unfortunately, she shook her head, showing her empty pockets. She had no money for a room. He sighed heavily, placing his

arm around her shoulder and leaning in. "No, no, no. Are we not friends? Now that we're going to journey together, we can't stand on formalities. I can pay for a room, and we can just share it. One corner will be yours, and the other will be mine."

Looking puzzled, she asked, "Friends?"

Sighing again, he looked at her. She really didn't understand what friends were. "Well... you could say friends are people who stick with each other through thick and thin. If one is in trouble, the other helps, and vice versa. They understand each other, trust each other, and rely on one another. You can laugh and do silly things together. You can have fights too! But at the end of the day, you both apologize and move on. Having friends is great, and you, Elara, are now my friend. You aren't getting rid of me that easily!"

She pondered this foreign concept of friends and decided to give it a try. "Yes, we are now friends. I accept your offer." He held out his hand, and she took it, shaking it. "And that's what we call a handshake."

They then headed to an inn, booked a cheap room, and went to their respective corners to turn in for the night. They had had a long day, and tomorrow would be even longer.

Chapter 5

The next morning, both of them woke up early, filled with anticipation for what the day would bring. They knew they needed to find a source of income to sustain their future travels. Evander had only enough funds to cover their stay at the inn for a few more days, so they set out to explore the market in hopes of finding work.

Elara wandered from bookstore to the food stall, hoping to find a job, but it seemed no one was interested in hiring her. On the other hand, Evander began working as an errand boy, taking on various menial tasks for shopkeepers around town. He would buy wood from the timber shop and deliver it to the carpenter, receiving payment upon completion. He also ran errands for the town guard, fetching tea or snacks in exchange for a small fee. Evander continued to do these odd jobs until evening, when he met up with Elara at the food stall they had agreed on.

After ordering dinner, they shared the details of their day. Elara felt a pang of guilt for not contributing to their finances. Evander, sensing her frustration, suddenly had an idea. “Why don’t you sell medicine? The herbal paste you used on me was very effective, and

you have a vast knowledge of herbs. I’m sure you could easily make some pain relief medicines and sell them on the streets!”

Elara mulled over the suggestion, calculating the cost of purchasing or harvesting herbs from the forest and considering which types of medicines she could produce and sell. Finally, she turned to Evander, who was eagerly awaiting her response. “Yes, your idea isn’t bad at all. Ointments for pain relief would be popular with the soldiers, and ointments for calluses and chapped fingers would likely sell well among artisans and women. Both can be made from herbs found in the forest. I’ll harvest the herbs tomorrow and start selling the ointments the day after.”

With a clear plan in mind, they looked forward to the upcoming days. They followed the same routine, with Elara harvesting herbs and setting up her small stand, while Evander continued his errands. The townspeople gradually got to know Evander, and his work expanded to include housewives who were too busy with their households to go out and buy necessities. Elara’s business, initially slow, picked up as she proved the effectiveness of her ointments. Word spread, and soon more people began purchasing them. Within a week, they had gathered enough funds to buy proper tents, traveling rations, and even some extra change. Elara used this to purchase a leather holster for her pocket knife at the armor shop she had first visited, where the bearded shopkeeper was happy to answer her many questions.

Feeling a deep sense of accomplishment, Elara and Evander started planning their route to their first major destination—a dairy farm located a week away from the town. They were eager to sample the renowned specialty products they had heard so much about: stringy, gooey cheese when melted, butter that could transform toast into a delightful treat, and fresh milk. The descriptions had sparked their curiosity and excitement. They planned to leave the

town in two days, catching a carriage heading to the dairy farm and hitching a ride on the merchant's caravan. All that remained was to purchase food rations, tents, and clothing before embarking on their journey.

As the long-awaited day arrived, Elara felt a mixture of sadness and anticipation. After spending nearly ten days in her first human town, she felt a pang of sorrow leaving behind the new experiences and the people she had met. Yet, her curiosity for the unknown and the adventures awaiting her with Evander made her eager to embrace the future.



Chapter 6

After a week of traveling on the cart, with sore backs and aching muscles, they finally reached the village of dairy. This destination was highly anticipated, as it promised various milk products that were hard to find anywhere else.

The farm was surrounded by lush meadows where cows, goats, and sheep grazed contentedly. Little farmhouses built from timber and stones dotted the pastures, with smoke gently rising from their chimneys. Nearby barns and sheds housed tools and feed, while a dedicated dairy building was bustling with activity. Inside, fresh milk was swiftly transformed into creamy butter, rich cheeses, and smooth curds. The scent of herbs used for flavoring cheese mingled with the fresh, earthy aroma of hay. Butter was churned in wooden barrels, and cheese wheels of various sizes were pressed and left to age on wooden shelves.

These dairy delicacies were exactly what they had come for. Carefully stored in cool cellars, these goods provided sustenance through harsh winters and were highly prized in local markets, making the farm a vibrant hub of both culinary and community

life. Elara and Evander checked into an inn first, leaving their luggage. Then they headed downstairs to ask the innkeeper for food recommendations. The innkeeper jovially pointed them toward a dainty little café.

Upon entering the café, they were greeted by the earthy aroma of wild herbs and grasses. A kind waitress escorted them to a small table by the windows, from where they could view the entire green pasture. When the waitress brought the menu, Elara bombarded her with a flurry of questions about the different types of cheese, how they were made, preserved, and what the cattle fed on. The waitress was overwhelmed and ran off to fetch the owner. Evander burst out laughing. “You really should stop bombarding people with questions like this. You’ll end up scaring them away, and then you’ll say goodbye to your answers.” Elara pouted and crossed her arms, pretending to be upset by his jab.

The owner of the café came out. She was a big, broad-shouldered woman in her mid-40s, with a big smile on her face and her hair in a bun. She wore a floury white apron with pride. “So, what does this little missy want to ask? You can ask whatever you want after you’re done eating. After all, no one can think on an empty stomach,” she said loudly and jovially.

Evander took the menu from the waitress and studied it. He ordered fresh salads with a creamy dressing, crispy toasts with extra butter, and some block cheese with juice. When the food arrived, the smell was heavenly. They devoured the meal in minutes, savoring every bite. After lunch, Evander went to explore the town and talk to some locals, while Elara sat down to pick the café owner’s brain. By nightfall, both were tired and stuffed with creamy delights. They had learned of a few more restaurants selling unique products and planned to visit them the next day. Evander also managed to sell some of Elara’s ointments while he was out.

The next morning, they followed a similar routine: breakfast at a nearby café, visiting the dairy farms, and observing the churning of milk to make butter and cheese. Elara was delighted to learn about these creations developed over centuries. They stayed at the dairy farm for a week before deciding to travel to see the ocean. A merchant caravan was bound to leave for a port town, so they paid the fare and hitched a ride with them, saying goodbye to the farm people.

After a month of traveling, changing caravans, and sleeping under the starry night sky, they finally reached a bustling seaport. The salty breeze welcomed them, and their eyes were met with an endless, dazzling blue expanse. The ocean! They were finally at the ocean! Evander quickly hopped off the cart and headed toward the docking area, where he cupped his hands, took some water from the sea, and drank it before Elara could stop him. He spat out the water immediately. “It really is salty! This entire endless body of water really is salty! You weren’t lying!”

“Of course I wasn’t, you doofus,” she chuckled, crossing her arms. “But I wonder why so many people have gathered in this port town? There aren’t any large towns or cities nearby to warrant such a large market.” Evander thought for a moment before answering, “Well, while there may not be any nearby towns or cities, sea ports are always busy because they connect us to other parts of the world. Many things are imported from outside countries, and our country also exports its special products. It’s a market for profit. Smaller boats carry fish and seafood down the streams to nearby small towns and villages.”

“That makes sense. Humans really have gone above and beyond in creating these ships that can travel through oceans.” Evander chuckled at her remark. “You talk as if you’re not human.”

Elara’s face went pale. She had let her guard down. Quickly coming

up with a response, she changed the topic and hoped he wouldn't notice. A strange feeling of guilt overcame her. It was almost as if she wanted to tell Evander the truth, regardless of the consequences but she knew better than to be swayed by these odd feelings.

They continued their walk through the town, greeted by fishy smells and products they had never seen before. As night approached, torches and lanterns were lit, illuminating the streets with a warm yellow glow. Elara and Evander visited a seafood stand, trying the specialty fish. Elara bombarded the cook with her usual flurry of questions, and the nearby customers also joined in to satisfy her curiosity. It was a merry night filled with laughter.

In the following days, they spent their time browsing shops, selling medicines for further funds, and running errands around the port. By the end of the week, they had gathered enough funds and information to decide their next destination.

They would jump continents, buying tickets to the nearest port across the sea and letting their feet decide where to go next. Excited, they went to the harbor and got themselves tickets. The ship would sail in three days. They packed and bought items, clothes, and medicines to prevent seasickness, all while eagerly awaiting their departure.

Three days passed quickly, and it was finally departure day. They took their baggage and headed up the sloping wooden plank to the ship's deck. An hour later, the ship raised its anchor and set sail into the great seas. The ship cut through the waves with a steady rhythm, its wooden hull creaking in harmony with the sea's song. As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting the sky in hues of orange and pink, the crew went about their evening duties. Their voices mingled with the call of seabirds heading to their nests and the gentle splash of water against the ship's sides. Dinner was served in a crowded hall on the deck, filled with passengers from



various places. In the clamor of clattering forks, Elara noticed a couple in the corner side by side, holding hands, with the woman resting her head on the man's shoulder. "Hey, Evander, why is that woman's belly swollen?" He looked up from his plate, following her gaze. "She's pregnant. She'll soon have a baby, and they'll become parents."

"But why would anyone voluntarily give birth? I read that childbirth is an extremely taxing and painful experience for the mother, and taking care of children is very tiring. Why would she have a child?" she asked. Although it sounded a bit insensitive to Evander, he knew she meant no harm. After thinking for a moment, he replied, "While childbirth is painful, it is also extremely fulfilling. A child is a physical manifestation of the love between two people. The child is like a legacy, carrying on their memories, hopes, and wishes into the future. It's not just a painful process; it's a sign of love."

"So this emotion of love is strong enough to make someone endure so much pain? What exactly is love?" she asked, steering the question towards her ultimate goal. She wanted to understand if love could be taught so she could become immortal and travel forever.

"Well, I personally haven't experienced falling in love yet, but I do know how it may feel. You feel happy in their presence and want to spend your entire life with them. You embrace their flaws and quirks, support each other through good times and bad, and your heart flutters when you're near them. It's a beautiful feeling to fall in love and be loved in return. Love can be romantic or familial, but it sustains the soul. I don't know much more than that. I'll let you know the rest if I ever fall in love," he said, winking with a silly grin. Elara felt a bit disappointed as she hoped for a step-by-step guide to falling in love, but she decided to be satisfied with understanding what love might be.

As days passed, the ship's deck was a hive of activity, with sailors managing the rigging, adjusting sails, and navigating by the stars and maps. Below deck, the hold was packed with goods for trade, from spices and silks to grains and livestock. The air was thick with the scent of saltwater, tar, and the mingling aromas simple meals. Life on board was harsh and cramped. The crew slept in tight quarters, often plagued by damp and disease. Elara and Evander shared a bunk bed. Food was basic, consisting mainly of salted meat,hardtack, and dried legumes. Despite the hardships, camaraderie developed among the crew and passengers over the almost 15-day voyage. Stories and songs were exchanged during calm nights, while orders were passed around on stormy ones. The sight of land was a welcome relief, heralding the end of their journey. The ship finally docked at its destination. Its arrival greeted with the sounds and sights of a new culture and an invitation to a new adventure ahead.

Disembarking, they were greeted by a cacophony of sounds: merchants hawking their wares, the clatter of hooves on cobblestones, and the lively chatter of locals and travelers alike. The air was thick with the scent of exotic spices, freshly baked bread, and the salty tang of the sea. After walking down the plank, they went to search for an inn to stay at. Narrow, winding streets led them through a labyrinth of stone buildings, their shutters painted in vibrant hues. Street performers played lutes and flutes, while craftsmen displayed intricate jewelry and finely woven textiles. After navigating through the crowded streets, they finally reached the inn that the captain of the ship had recommended.

It was a three-story building made of stones of various sizes, unlike the bricked or timber houses of their previous destinations. They were definitely in a different location. After checking in, they left their luggage and hurriedly went out, eager to explore the market. The innkeeper warned them to be careful on the streets and wary

of pickpockets. They thanked the innkeeper and set out to explore. Elara went to see various circus acts, people gambling and betting their luck on the roadside, tarot card readers, and suspicious merchants selling blessed and anti-witch goods. Meanwhile, Evander scouted for the best dining spots, specialty products, and an accurate map of the nearby areas.

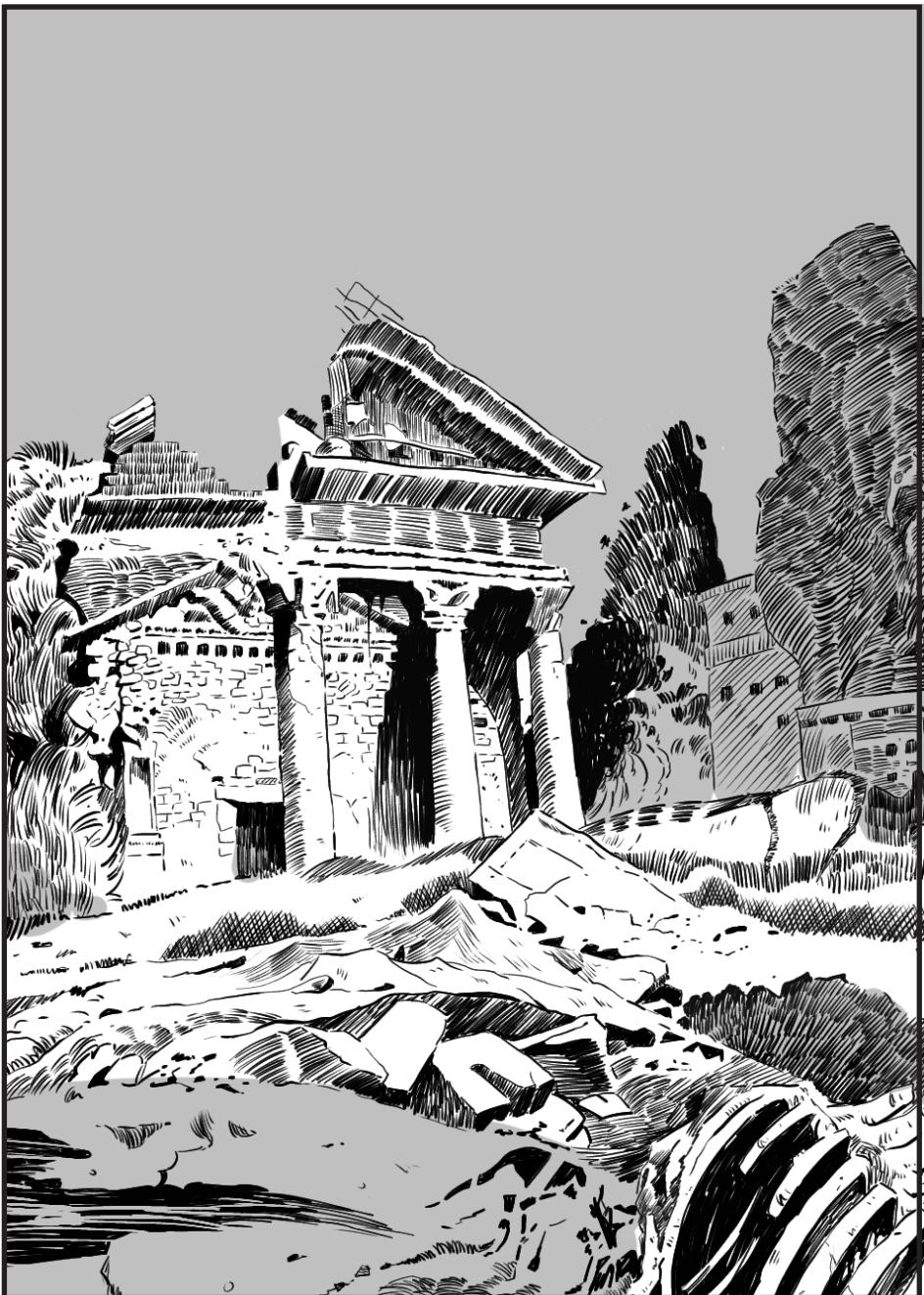
While Evander was in one of the many alleys, he felt someone brush past his waist. He quickly reached for his leather waist bag to check if everything was there, recalling the innkeeper's warning. He fumbled through the bag, quickly realizing that his money pouch was missing. He raced after the kid he had identified as the pickpocket, but unfortunately, the kid knew these alleys too well. Soon, Evander was lost and out of breath in an abandoned-looking street. As he walked further, he stumbled upon the slums—people starving, sleeping on the streets, with no place to call home or a roof over their heads. Some were high on opium, and the sounds of a fight could be heard further down the street. Evander clutched his bag tightly, turned around, and ran out of that alley. He decided not to pursue the kid any further. Fortunately, he had distributed the money into several different pouches, which he had kept in different pockets as a countermeasure against pickpocketing, as advised by the innkeeper. His preparedness saved him from losing too much money. The rest of the day was uneventful for him.

Meanwhile, Elara was roaming closer to the docks, where she saw a line of men and women with their hands tied and their feet chained to weights, dressed in shabby, coarse clothing, dragging themselves down the plank. A few soldiers were pulling the rope mercilessly to make them walk faster. Elara was shocked by this scene. How could they be so cruel? Humans had once banded together to corner innocent witches, but now these same people had turned against their own kind. She could not wrap her head around this cruelty or why everyone else didn't even seem to care. Unable to hold back

her curiosity, she walked to a nearby shopkeeper and asked him, "Mister, why are these people tied up and in chains? Isn't it cruel?" He nonchalantly answered without looking up from his work, "It is not cruel. It's what they deserve. They are all criminals who were tried by the imperial court for heinous crimes like stealing bread or adultery or murder, and now they are being sold as slaves to work in the mines here for the rest of their lives." Elara walked away from the docks. She got the answer to her question, but their misery still weighed heavily on her heart. At night, they both met again at the inn and described their day's events. To prevent further risks, they decided to explore the port together.

The next morning, they spent their day eating food, selling medicine, working some odd jobs, buying trinkets and travel essentials, and gathering information for their next destination. Days passed, and they decided on their next location—a city abandoned after a skirmish between the common people and the nobles, who had scorched the entire town to ashes to suppress the masses. It was two days away by cart from the port. They made their preparations, hitched a ride in a merchant caravan that was passing near the town, and left down an uneven path to their next destination.

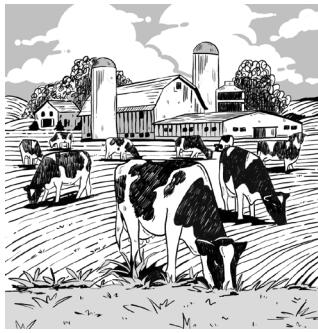
After traveling, the caravan dropped them off close to the abandoned town and drove off. Elara and Evander walked toward the town. The abandoned town of Eversham lay in ruins, a haunting testament to the wrath of the nobles. Once a thriving community, it now stood as a desolate and charred landscape. Blackened remnants of homes and shops, their rooms and stone walls collapsed into piles of rubble, lined the empty streets. The smell of ash and smoke still lingered even after years. The stone church, once a beacon of faith and hope and a safe haven for those incapable of fighting, had not been spared; its steeple toppled and its stained glass shattered, leaving gaping holes in its walls. The town square, where market stalls had bustled with activity, was now littered with debris and the



skeletal remains of what was once the heart of Eversham's social life. Silence reigned where laughter and the clamor of daily life had once filled the air. The only sounds were the distant cawing of crows and the eerie whisper of the wind through the burned-out husks of buildings. The noble lords had ordered the destruction to quell a rising rebellion, their heavy-handed response leaving nothing but desolation in their wake.

Elara and Evander could feel the screams of the people as their town was burned down—their fear and desperation. Elara was deep in thought, “Humans haven’t changed through the centuries. How could they, who once banded together under the name of religion, who once vowed on their brotherhood to take down all the witches, turn against each other and burn their own cities to the ground? If they were going to do that, then why did they persecute the witches? They had done no wrong! Just why?” A sudden clatter from nearby snapped her back to reality as Evander moved in front of her, trying to shield her from whatever had made the noise. As they inched closer, they came to an open space where they saw a few surviving townspeople, scattered, going about their daily lives. The town had now become home to the victims of the tragedy who had nowhere else to go, for refugees, for criminals who managed to evade the imperial soldiers, and for people who could not afford a home. The town of Eversham was trying to get back on its feet, with meager meals and minimal comfort; the people worked hard to revive their homes. To survive in this harsh world, it now stood as a symbol of human resilience. Both Elara and Evander gazed at each other, not uttering a word but understanding each other’s intent. They were going to help the townspeople for a while with whatever they could afford. They stayed and helped rebuild some houses, with Elara showing her knowledge of architecture. And their days passed. This was just the start of their many travels and adventures, which they would continue for years to come.

MEMORIES



"THE REST ARE
ALL IN THEIR
HEARTS AND
MIND."



Chapter 7

After years of wandering, visiting various locations, enduring near-death experiences, and sharing countless moments of laughter and sadness, Elara and Evander had grown closer than ever. Elara had never imagined that she would be traveling with someone, let alone a human, but now the thought of traveling without him seemed impossible. She noticed how her days seemed brighter when he was around and how, in his absence, she often caught herself searching for him in the shadows or in the routine of daily tasks.

This was a strange feeling—a fluttering sensation in her chest whenever she saw him, a warmth that spread through her like the sun's gentle rays. Yet, Elara struggled to understand these feelings. She thought perhaps she was simply happy to have a friend who made her feel safe and who had taught her many things about humans—about their emotions, trade, politics, and other priceless inventions. When they traveled, it was as if the world narrowed to just the two of them, facing the world together, while the background faded away. Still, she brushed these feelings aside, attributing them to the thrill of friendship and companionship she had never experienced before. She was unaware that her longing to

be near him, her happiness at his smile, and the way her world felt incomplete without him were signs of something deeper than mere friendship.

Elara hadn't realized that the tender buds of her first love had long since blossomed in her heart. At some point during their journey, she had stopped aging and had become immortal. Initially, she didn't notice the change, but over the years, as she witnessed Evander grow older, she finally realized she had not aged. Evander had gone through puberty; he was now taller than her, his voice deeper, and his face showed hints of facial hair. The boy she had once saved had become a man whose presence she found both reassuring and comforting. Yet, she remained the same—her height and appearance unchanged through time. It was unmistakable; she had become immortal, though she didn't know why. Despite the clear evidence, Elara still believed she had never fallen in love, even though the signs were glaringly obvious.

Her thoughts were interrupted as Evander shook her shoulder, announcing that they were almost there—the town where their journey had first begun. Though this town was not their final destination, but rather a stop on their way to the ice desert they had heard about in their travels, the nostalgia hit them hard. Memories of how they first decided to become friends and travel companions, her initial experiences of earning, and the nights they spent strolling through the streets felt fresh in their memories. Evander was glowing with happiness, holding Elara's hand and pointing out the various shops that had remained unchanged through the years. Yet, Elara's happiness was tinged with unease; being back in the town forced her to confront the fact that she had not aged much since the beginning of their journey.

She knew she had to leave him. Elara felt she could no longer stay by Evander's side, fearing that he would soon notice her lack of

aging. She was terrified of betraying his expectations and felt guilty for deceiving him over the years. The thought of being betrayed by him, or worse, being exposed as a witch and facing death at the stake, was unbearable. She trusted him, and knew that he was also not likely to turn her in, but then that would put his safety into jeopardy. She had to leave him before he discovered her secret. Before he was out into a precarious situation. It seemed fitting to end their journey at the place where it all began—filled with emotions and memories.

Elara watched as Evander, holding her hand, pointed and talked about the things they did when they were younger, oblivious to her plan. He hadn't changed much, except that he now looked older. A bittersweet smile crossed her face as she realized these would be their last few days together. A sharp pain in her chest, almost as if it was being torn apart, made her decision all the more agonizing. The next few days, Elara stayed close to Evander, engaging in lively conversations and enjoying their time together. Evander noticed her increased talkativeness and joviality, attributing it to the excitement and nostalgia of their first town.

When the time finally came for her to leave, Elara had finished buying supplies and packing her belongings. She stole one last, longing glance at Evander, as if hoping he would wake up and stop her from leaving. But before she could change her mind, she ran off, tears streaming down her face. Her heart felt as if it was being ripped apart, but she believed this was the only way to protect both herself and Evander. If the imperial guards or the church discovered him traveling with a witch, he would be in danger too. With a tear-streaked face, she slipped away into the darkness.

Solve the puzzle to find out what her heart truly desired. The feelings that even Elara hadn't realised.



The next morning, Evander was surprised to find Elara missing from her room, and all her belongings gone. As he rushed inside, a piece of paper placed under a rock caught his eye. Upon closer inspection, he realized it was a letter addressed to him. With trembling hands, he opened the envelope and read the neat cursive handwriting that belonged to Elara:

"Dear Evander,

I'm sorry for leaving you without an explanation, but I have decided to travel by myself. The years we spent together have become precious memories and will forever remain in my heart. We have ended our journey in the same place where we began, and now it's time for me to travel alone as I originally intended. With a heavy heart, I sincerely hope you will not try to find me or track me down.

Regards,
Elara
Your travel companion and friend.

P.S. This is not a joke, Evander. I am being serious. Don't try to find me."

Evander closed the letter with shaking hands and ran out of the inn. For days, he asked around for Elara's whereabouts—merchants, cart drivers, guards, and even housewives he had once helped. But despite his efforts, he found no trace of her or any clue about her movements. Such is the magic of witches, capable of vanishing without a trace. Desperate not to lose her, he decided to follow the route they had planned to travel together, hoping to find her by the time he completed the list of destinations. He left with a heavy heart, his once bright smile and talkative nature missing.

Chapter 8

Decades had passed since Elara had left Evander behind. Her journey had taken her across continents, through deserts, forests, mountains, and seas. She had witnessed empires rise and fall, learned countless languages and customs, and made friends in the most unexpected places. Yet, no matter how far she traveled or how many new experiences she encountered, her heart still ached from leaving him behind. No one had ever managed to replace Evander for her, even after all these years.

Now, once again, she found herself standing at the crossroads where their journey had begun and where it had ended. The town had changed significantly. It had grown larger, with many of the children she once knew now grown into adults. New shops had replaced the old ones, and the familiar streets were transformed. Her mind wandered back to the days filled with laughter, jokes, and the occasional nagging.

Her thoughts drifted to Evander. "I wonder if he's still alive? It's been decades. Did he settle down, or is he still traveling? Is he married now? What if he's still here, waiting for me?" She quickly

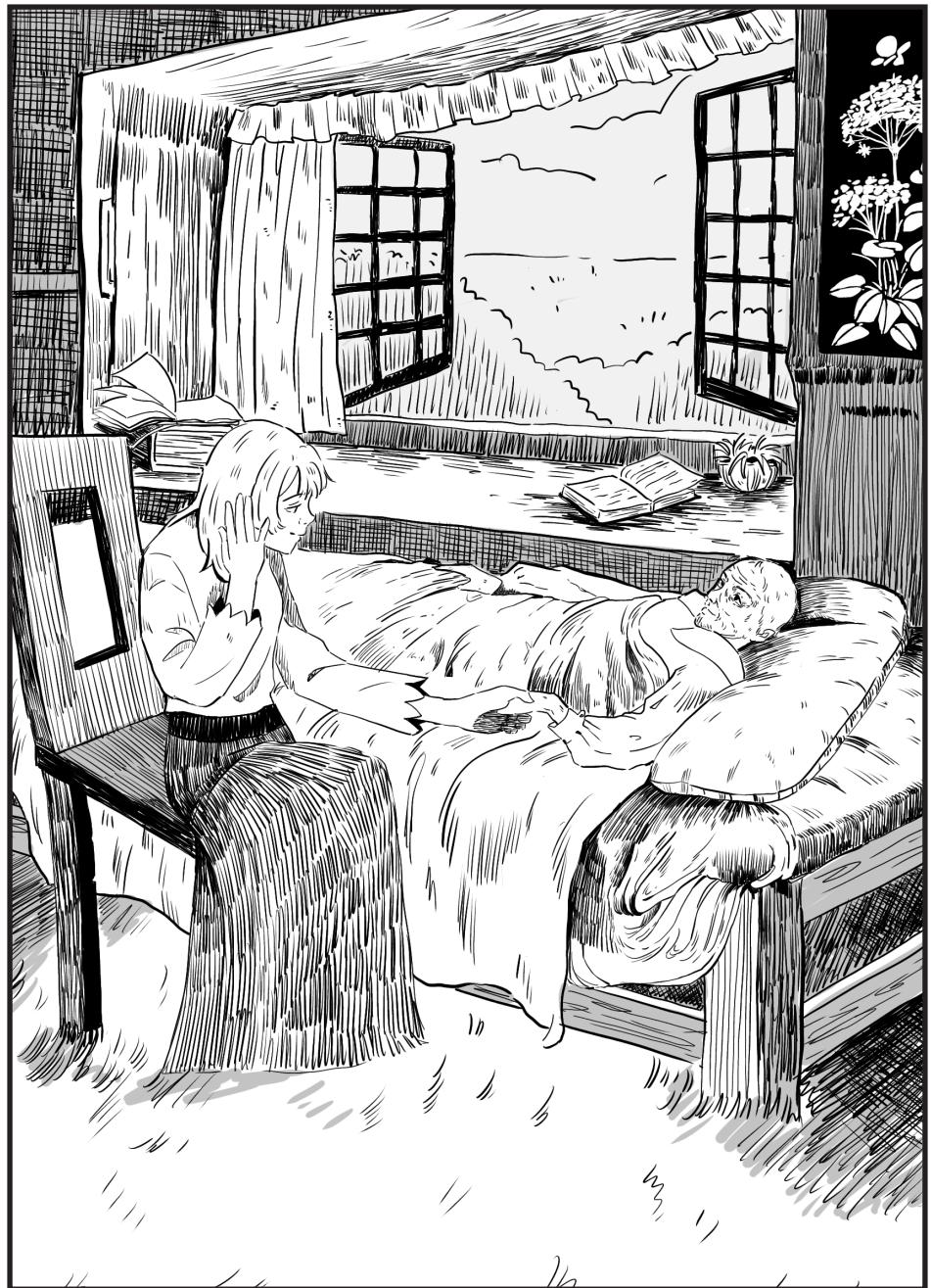
shook her head, as if the physical act could dispel the hope that had taken root. But the seed of hope had been sown, and there was no turning back.

Determined to find out, Elara began asking around the town if anyone knew Evander. One by one, people shook their heads. Some pointed out other boys named Evander, but none of them were the one she sought. Most of those who had known the young Evander had passed away from old age. As the days went by, her hope began to wane. What were the chances that he had actually waited for her? After numerous attempts and growing frustration, she finally received a promising lead. An elderly woman directed her to a small cottage further down the road, mentioning that an old man named Evander lived there.

Hope slowly crept back into her heart, causing it to pound faster with each step she took towards the cottage. When she arrived, doubt began to creep in. What if she couldn't recognize him? It had been decades, and he should have definitely aged. But it was too late to turn back now. Summoning her courage, she peered through a tiny window. The room inside was cluttered with souvenirs, maps, and trinkets from around the world, all covering the walls and shelves. In the corner of the room was a tiny bed where a wrinkled old man lay breathing softly. Her heart recognized him instantly; it was Evander. There was no doubt in her mind. He was still alive!

She wanted to meet him and reminisce about old times, but guilt overwhelmed her. She felt unworthy of his presence after having left him behind. As she was about to walk away, her heart heavy with regret, a feeble voice called out, "Who's there? No need to peek in on an old man. Come on in, there's nothing of much value in this house anyway."

Hearing his voice, Elara could no longer resist the urge to see him



She hesitantly opened the creaking door and walked inside, approaching the bed. "Bend down for me, dear, I can't see very well anymore," he said. She bent down, and he continued, "You look familiar somehow, even though I don't know many young people these days." Elara felt flustered, unable to let him recognize her. She stuttered, "W-we...well, I was walking by and saw all these interesting trinkets through the window and became curious. So, I was just peeking. Sorry to disturb."

He laughed, the sound still familiar and warm. "No, I definitely know you." Gently, he placed his hand on her cheek, feeling her features. "Is th-th-that you, E-E-Elara? Is it really you?" His voice trembled, and his hand shook as he reached out to hold hers. Elara struggled to hold back her tears, trying to deny it in a squeaky voice, but he was insistent. That unwavering determination hadn't changed over the years.

"I looked all around the town for you. I traveled to all the places we had planned to visit and even more, hoping to run into you. I spent ten years searching, but after an injury, I had to stop traveling and settled here, hoping you would return. Over time, I met a woman, married her, and now I even have grandchildren. I am so happy to see you again, to see you before I die." Tears rolled down his face as he smiled, even with missing teeth, his joy evident.

Elara could no longer contain her emotions. Grasping his hand tightly, she burst into tears, replying through her sobs, "I-I had no choice. I had stopped aging... I was terrified you would find out I was a witch. I was scared to confront my own feelings. Yes... now I realize I was foolish. I fell for you long ago. But I ran. I didn't want to die, and even more, I was afraid of losing you. I was scared of you protecting me and putting yourself in danger. No one can ever replace you."

They looked at each other with blurry eyes, absorbing the affection they had missed over the years. Finally, Evander chuckled softly,

"I knew you were a witch. After all, how else would I have found a young girl in the middle of the forbidden forest? Besides, your way of speaking sometimes suggested you weren't entirely human, and I had already realized you weren't aging. It's quite foolish of you to realize it so late." Elara was bewildered. "Y-you knew?" Then both of them burst into laughter together, their shared joy palpable despite the tears.

Elara finally understood the cruel nature of love. To fall in love with someone meant to watch them age and die while remaining the same. She would be left alone in the world, unable to follow them into the afterlife. The thought of being forever stuck in time was overwhelming.

As she started to break down again, as if sensing her turmoil, Evander spoke softly, "You won't be alone. You won't be stuck in time. I will forever live on in your heart and memories. You will move forward, meet new people, and maybe even fall in love again. Live in the moment and never hesitate to follow your heart. Love is inevitable, and so is death. It's all part of a cycle. Don't cry, my brave Elara."

These sounded like the last words of a dying man. Elara was frantic; she didn't want to lose him again, not after finally finding him. But, alas, Evander drew his last breath, holding her hand, as if he had been waiting just for her arrival. Elara broke down into tears once more. Fate had been too cruel, but his final words resonated within her. She vowed to honor his words. Wiping away her tears, she took a small pendant from among his many trinkets as a keepsake and left the house.

With her mind now clear, Elara accepted that she was a witch and would always be one. She had an eternity to learn and explore. She had experienced the pain of love and loss. She made an oath

to herself to follow her heart and to live in the moment. After all, just because she had an eternity to ponder didn't mean others would have the same opportunity. They would forget or move on if she didn't embrace the present. With a heavy heart, a tear-streaked face, and a determined spirit, Elara set out on her journey once again.



The End



*"I don't know where I
am going, but I am on my
way. I will never stop
moving forward."*

~ Elara





ABOUT THE BOOK

This book was written, illustrated and bound by Parna Sinha, a student of the Visual Communication, Semester 3, for the final assignment of book binding. It was written with the hopes of reaching an audience who love to read but are hesitant on reading thick, full on text novels.

It's reader base consists of readers transitioning out of children's book to books with more text and for adults who just like short stories in their long daily lives. The illustrations and the interactive components make it an exciting yet simple read.

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

The title of this book comes from Latin - In(not) and Mortalis(dead). It came into existence as the final assignment for elective 2 - book binding. Throughout the two weeks we learned of various binding techniques such as hard bound, japanese binding, chinese bindidng etc... At the end of it, we were told to create our own books and use our creativity to bind the pages together to create a book. We had the liberty of writing our own stories or copying existing stories or using movies as guidlines to tell a story. We had free reign over out thoughts and actions which allowed us to bring our ideas to life.

My inspiration for the design of the cover was from a youtuber - Martina belonging to the channel Nerdforge. I was inspired by her light up fantasy covers and wanted to test it out for myself for a long time. This assignment was the perfect opportunity for me to do so. I was completely out of my comfort zone, trying to work with materials I had never really used before, but there is a first time for everything. While working, I faced certain problems such as the thickness of the cover, how to wire the circuit, what lights to use, where to put the battery etc... But with the help of my teachers I managed to pull it off. Some problems like the bulky cover and the battery still do remain, but I tried my best to camouflage them with the design.

Hope the story was to your liking and that you had a fun time reading it.

- Parna Sinha

Immortalis

Witches were once revered as protectors under the guidance of the goddess Astrea. Through centuries humanity's perception slowly shifts, leading to fear and persecution of the witches. In response, the witches retaliate, prompting Astrea to curse them with immortality tied to love. Any witch who falls in love becomes immortal, doomed to watch their beloved age and die.

Despite this curse, Elara - a young witch, sees this curse as an opportunity. She sees the curse not as a punishment but as an opportunity to explore the world and its wonders without the constraints of time. Driven by an unquenchable curiosity, she embarks on a journey through ancient forests and forgotten lands, seeking to experience love and gain immortality, not knowing the heartache it promises. Follow Elara as she learns the true meaning of immortality—not just in endless years but in the memories and connections she makes along the way.

