Prologue

“It is marvellous what any mind can conjure. The deepest fears, and the highest desires. It is beauty incarnate. However, what will happen if everything is left to mind alone? Will the Paradise be created, or will the Hell spill over into our world?”

The evening was calm. The fire in the pit was crackling, which helped with getting bugs to stay away. Four figures sat around the campfire, with jolly songs and jests before a long night. Their voices sounded human, with one exception. That exception was Vlakir, a curious creature.

“Why so quiet?”, asked one of the humans, “We all tell stories of old, but you, you tell nothing. Why that? Do you not like us?”  
 And the Vlakir calmly answered, “I do not wish to disrespect, but in my stories of old, the is no jolly or happiness to be found. I would hate to ruin the mood.”  
 “Trust me Mask\*, happiness can only be found in comparison, and soon if we don’t stop, our bellies shall explode and be naught but the feast for the night crawlers\*”, laughingly added another man. His long moustache and a big belly gave off a friendly aura.   
 “There is truth in that”, added a woman in a violet robe, a sign of a wizard, “if I dare laugh once more, I daren’t think of the consequences.”

The air grew still for a moment. Trees ceased rumbling, no birds sang, and the bugs quit their nightly buzzing. Kresh, for that was Vlakirs’ name, rubbed his four arms, twisting his lower once around his torso, and drew his equine face closer to the fire, and stared into the blaze.

“Clyde, a person of Haran”, he motioned towards a big-bellied human, “you know not of the struggles of oppression. Your kind lives in freedom and harmony. No calamity befell you, and no one tried to force you to your knees. You live your life trading and tending to crops. Not fighting for your life.”  
 “Mustafa, a person of Kish” he turned his face towards the first man, “you travel across the endless deserts and the daring seas. Your life is naught without the freedom and adventure in it. The blazing cities that your kind erects are a marvel to behold and are made as a symbol to your heritage. You know not of the weight of the iron chains around your neck, nor the stinging pain of the whip.”  
 “And you, a Valar”, he looked at the woman, “your magic is everything to you. Longer, and more meaningful lives you live, thanks to its gifts. The cities in the coldest tundras can be walked with nothing but a shirt over you, and your castles pierce the heavens. The marvels you create, the lands you explore, the knowledge you posses, all thanks to it. Take it away, and make it your enemy, what will your kind become then?”  
 “That is what my kind had to endure. Survival, slavery, and calamities beyond your imagination. The magic you so praise was our enemy, our villain, or captor. We have no good stories to tell. No heroes have coalesced in our kind. No wars won. No daring fights for freedom. None. Only survival. Thanks to that, we live. We adapt. We never give up...”

There was a new kind of stillness now. Similar to one at the funerals. A morbid acceptance of life.

Suddenly, a cry of laughter come out from Mustafa’s lips. “With your words, you can cut through Fariin steel.”

“I don’t understand what you mean”, said Kresh. “Who’s Fariin?”

“I mean, that you... how to best put it? You speak with such fire and darkness at the same time, it stings right into your soul. No offence. For whom Fariin are, well... let’s just say they are the best blacksmiths in Esterra.”

“And stupid rebels, who burn churches and sacred... em... traditions! That’s the word!”

“Ease yourself, Clyde”, gently spoke the woman, “they too have a merit and a reason. Besides, not all of them are iconoclasts.”

“I never thought a Valar, of all the people, would defend Fariin. Bah, preposterous.”

“My origin matters not in the discussion about progress and personal beliefs, I am my own person and can decide for myself who I support. I live only as myself, and not as an extension of our empire.”

“Next thing you will say, is that you value your name and see others as equals to you”

“I do and I do. You know my name, and I see other not as underlings under me, but as a cooperative allies, unless proven otherwise.”

“What do that mean?”

“It means Etra helps others and see others with kindness, unless they show otherwise.”, answered Kresh.

“We went off topic for far too long”, said Mustafa.

With a simple nod, Etra agreed, and looked at Kresh inquisitively.

“What about the story of your grandfather? He is celebrated by your people as a hero, is he not?”

Kresh pondered for a second. Letting his mind catch up to that thought. He is celebrated, though lived decades ago.

“How do you know of him? He lived a long time ago, and you don’t look old enough to have lived that long.”

“I appreciate your flattery, but we Valar live easily past a century. And trust me, I have met your grandfather in person. However, I was not able to hear his tale. I hope he hasn’t excluded my intervention in his stories.”

“Maybe. But what about him?”

“How about you tell us his tale. I am sure it will inspire us.”

“I love stories of heroes!”, exclaimed Clyde.

“I only hope you will understand his words!”, laughingly shouted Mustafa, “I guess you shouldn’t have skipped you lessons in the church school!”

“Shut! You not know my tongue, and you insult me for not know yours. Learn mine, and we will see who knows best.”

“Enough!”, shouted Etra with a voice only a true hero possesses, “We will hear Kresh talk without interruptions!”

With a heavy sign, Kresh started. “It all happened long time ago. In the lands far beyond reach now. Abandoned by their fore claimers. In the Bustling archipelago”

Chapter 1: Longing

“Hundred times I was in this forest, hundred time I hunted here, yet no passion flows through me now. Conar, my friend, how I wish you were here. So long, my friend. So long.”

*It was a clear day. As clear as it can be, with all the storms and dust in the clouds. At least the sun was there. Somewhere. Even the forest wasn’t a true forest anymore. My joints are sore and stiff. It could only get worse, only if started to rain.*

Herald looked up to the skies with a hope in his eyes. He secretly wanted for rain to start, so he could go back home. In his cosy little chair, with a fireplace before him and a hot soup in his hands. The village needed food though, and he had to hunt.