**Queen’s First Love**

A year has passed since Mistran fell to external control. Queen resides in the northern forest of the city, living in a secluded hut, doing next to nothing. One stormy winter day, a man approaches Queen’s hut. He collapses upon seeing it, and the sound wakes Queen from her stupor. She carries him inside and warms him with a fire, assuming him to be a hunter that got lost in the blizzard. The man awakens and recovers over the next few days. He converses with Queen, who is quiet and reserved, nearly emotionless.

The man explains that he was a musician for the Queen of Mistran, and sought to rebel against the powers that control the city now. He was caught and exiled north. Aimlessly, he wandered for days, finally making here. He recounts legends that a witch lived in the north forest, and jokingly asks if his savior is that witch. Queen looks at him through messy hair, and a moment of silence falls between the two. The man introduces himself, finally, as Brin. He asks if the woman is Queen.

Queen opens her mouth, speaking in longer sentences now. She says yes, that she used to be. But she doesn’t feel like she is now. She’s just existing. Brin nods. He confesses he’s getting very hungry. Queen takes on a look of surprise. Without a word, she leaves the shelter. A few hours later, she returns with berries and fish. Brin asks how she has survived out in the wild. Queen is silent for a while.

Finally, she blurts out that she isn’t human. That she’s an Elemental. Brin processes the information. It’s difficult to come to terms with. The two have a long back and forth about her past. She doesn’t reveal her actions in the Second Age, only those with humans. Brin is understandably struck with disbelief. It takes a few days for the conversation to fully play out, and for Brin to organize all the information.

As winter begins to release its grasp upon the forest, Brin and Queen get outside more. Brin leads an effort to improve the hut, patching holes and strengthening the roof. Queen stands by at the start, but begins to put in more effort as she sees Brin work hard. She asks why Brin is still here, to which he responds that he has nowhere else he’d like to be. Queen assumes he must be afraid of her, at what she could do if he ran. Brin denies this outright.

A period of awkward interactions cover the next few days. Queen puts emotional walls up, and Brin just keeps at his daily work. The campsite has grown a lot. The shelter is starting to fall apart, so Brin has been clearing out an area nearby to build a cabin. Queen assists, but only when asked. Within a month, the cabin is set up. Brin and Queen move everything in, and Queen is shocked at how at-home she feels. Early summer begins to arrive. Brin and Queen construct a fence, now working very well together.

One day, Queen asks if this is life now. Just sitting in the forest. Brin shrugs and says he’s comfortable with it. He does say he’d like some animals around, though. Queen sits on this thought for a while. The question almost seems foreign: Are you comfortable living? A few days later, Queen disappears. Brin wakes in the morning to find her absent. He calls out for her around the area to no response. He spends a few days in isolation. His days are mostly gathering food and water, making repairs to the cabin, and gathering wood. The work isn’t easy though, without the Elemental assistance he’s used to.

Without warning, Queen returns. She carries two chickens, and places them within the fence. Brin is ecstatic at her return. But he still requests she explain herself if she’s going to leave for days at a time. Queen laughs--The first time in what feels like ages. The two construct a ramshackle coop for the chickens and redouble their effort on strengthening the fence. The summer passes in relative reverie. Queen expresses her deep sense of freedom, suddenly not caring about ruling a city, or existential angst. Brin celebrates this, having similarly lost his care for revolution. The two are happy to just live near each other, having a simple life.

Years pass. The couple’s area expands, small gardens of various vegetables and grains dotted around. The chickens have multiplied, and provide a food source for Brin. Queen and Brin have fallen deeply in love. But life in the forest isn’t easy. Brin falls ill more frequently as time wears on. He must rest for days, then weeks. As Queen recognizes this, she begins to work frantically to extend Brin’s life. Eventually though, Brin tells her not to. That he doesn’t want to live forever. Queen listens to his request, knowing the feeling. But she still feels conflicted. She doesn’t want this to end, the simple life. Queen struggles to conceptualize an after.

On a quiet winter day, Brin passes away in his sleep. Queen sits in the cabin with him until night. Near morning, she leaves, wordlessly.