

Gems in the Sea

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Self Cadence

The metallic drumming of rain upon the rooftop, had awaken Jasmine from her sleep. It had been an unfruitful attempt at sleep; she lay restless in her bed of ruffled covers, her body drenched in sweat. The dreams had been more frequent, sometimes they seemed too real. Often times she awoke torn between the dream world and the realm in which she resided. She wondered, perhaps, if at times, the worlds were ever one. Sometimes Jasmine could see the fabrics of her reality collide with her dreams and everytime she witnessed this her senses were sent into a frenzy of uncontrolled bursts of vertigo. Maybe it wasn't the worlds that were separate, but her perception of her dreams and reality.

A knock at the door, interrupted her thoughts. Jasmine emitted a groan as she fumbled out of the bed, searching the floor with her feet till she found the slippers she had left by the side of her bed. Luckily the shift she had worn, hadn't torn in the night like the last one. Her face turned red as she remembered when she had answered the door with a half ripped garment draped around her. Shaking the memory from her mind, she approached the door.

Slippers scuffled across the floor as Jasmine made her way through the hallway. The shadows played no tricks on her eyes, she was well adapt to waking up so early, and had become accustomed to moving in the dark. The curtains fluttered in the cold morning air that blew through the open windows. Something about the curtains made her mind halt. A sinking feeling leaching at her stomach. It was something she had dreamt earlier, but knew to blow it aside; for her dreams never impacted upon her reality.

The knocking came once again, resounding from the hard wood door that stood mere inches from Jasmine's body. Peering through the door's peep hole she could see the outline of a man tapping his foot impatiently. She had hoped it wouldn't be him, but she was wrong. Unlocking the door in a flurry of quick slaps, and agitated swings, she was eager to be rid of the unwelcomed guest.

Shifts

The man at the door was her neighbor, a scrawny little guy who had a knack for being annoying. It was all in good heart though; he seemed to genuinely care about people. Just sometimes he cared too much.

"You alright?" He asked, "I heard you scream and just thought I'd come and rescue you!"

"So you knock on the door?" Irritation at his ignorance seeped through the question. "That wouldn't have been very helpful now would it?"

The man shuffled his feet back and forth, holding his hands behind his back. He always acted so childish. "Sorry..." he muttered.

"Look, I've been screaming, as you call it, for three nights now. Nothing's wrong Vince, just go home." Her voice was become a bit uncontrolled.

"I.. I... You see.." He started to speak, but the words were lost to Jasmine. She saw the fabrics of the dream world shift and collide and now her senses were a blur. Random sounds incurring at odds moments, colors and shapes blending together and then, suddenly, everything was black.

Vince smiled as she collapsed in front of him. He knew what she saw, he saw the fabrics too. Jasmine had not learned to deal with their meanings, and apparently, even after all this time, she had not become accustomed to the vertigo that ensued from the visions.

A Start To The Dream

Sounds and light slowly filtered into Jasmine's steam of conscious. What happened? She thought to herself. It was as if her body had taken a trip that her mind could not remember or conceive of. Her hands roamed the coarse, wet floor as she tried to discern her surroundings.

Vision returned, Jasmine found her surroundings odd and surreal. The world seemed to move with a pulse; every so often the trees would oscillate as if bent by some unseen force.

Beyond the trees Jasmine could see spires rising from the ground. Glowing objects surrounded their obsidian faces. Each light giving off it's own sickly green glow in it's orbit. She wondered what lay ahead of her this time. In her dreams she had never had the ability to move, it was always her being ripped apart by some unseen force, or her trying to run but not being able too.

Something about this dream was different. Jasmine could move, her eyes saw a constant stream of images; sound was as constant as it was in the real world. Her mind urged her to move towards the black spikes rising from the ground. Though uncertain of her own motivation, Jasmine began a trot towards the distant spires.

He could see a figure approaching his stronghold quickly. It was odd, not many people could hold themselves in his world well enough to move. This one already proved to be different. The man figured it best to see this individual upon closer inspection before terminating their existence. The clouds of energy floated past him illuminating his figure on top of his temple. He wondered if the young lady had seen him. It mattered not. For the souls were plenty, therefore his power was plenty. This one would be easy to remove from the world, but the curiosity tore at him. He needed to know; what made this one so different?

All Jasmine could think about as she trudged through the forest was how much she hated this place, and hated these dreams. How many hours had she spent in the couch of a predictable therapist where she religiously listened to their opinions on

the nightmares, and how her life was suffering because of them. Always about how her fiancé left her, or how she missed her mother. She shuddered at that memory of her mother, and the bridge. *The car was speeding across that cursed bridge when a tire violently shredded to bits. Jasmine and her mother were flung into the river eighty feet below, trapped inside a locked automotive coffin. She watched her mother drown at the age of eight, while the car slowly sank to the bottom. Finally her suffering ended when she slowly suffocated as well. Jasmine was awoken at the hospital, where the exuberant doctors claimed it as a miracle, but her mother wasn't as equally blessed.*

Thunder crackled overhead, breaking Jasmine's thoughts and re-igniting her curiosity. She could now vaguely see the base of one of the towers, where there appeared to be a wall shrouded in fog. *How old is that wall*, she wondered as she trudged onwards. It appeared from this distance to have a long forgotten Babylonian style to it, and indescribable beauty. The trees were beginning to thin out more, and resemble a ghastly field full of gloom and misery. And that is when she saw him.

A figure clothed in midnight approached Jasmine, menacing but comforting. He seemed to reach for her, to call out to her deepest desires, but his damp red lips told her different. She backed away from him, but the fog deepened before her and the trees seemed to march tightly shut behind. She thrust her hand toward her right thigh to find emptiness in place of her knife and prepared to unleash a hellish scream. The figure moved closer to her and suddenly disappeared, scattering a green, glowing mist through the low-lying clouds.

Jasmine could feel the persona of the black-clad man surrounding her, enveloping her, whispering in her mind. She forced the devilish cries from her head, but failed with her ears. Barely audible, the man expressed incredible feats of his past, told Jasmine of his war against mortality. He kissed her supple cheek and kept his freezing hands wrapped around her neck, warning her of his control. He pushed her gently back against the trees, letting her feel his heart beat against her chest. Jasmine was suffocating as he slowly applied pressure to her throat with his fingers, and she began to panic. She blindly swung her arms at nothing, and continued so for minutes on end before she realized there was no one near her. She fell to her knees crying, pillowing her head against the barkless trees. The fog nearly lulled Jasmine to sleep, and she felt the tower beckoning to her, telling her of wonder and danger. The wall was nowhere to be seen.

"I can give you anything you wish for, Jasmine," said a warm and seductive voice. It was the man's voice in her head again, and it was no longer cold and biting. Tired and afraid, though intensely curious to see what the beautiful tower had to offer, its top window now flickering with ages-old candlelight, she reluctantly pushed on.

Deceit

From the tower he could see Jasmine approaching slowly. She had been able to prevent him from killing her, but he would do so eventually. What control he had over his form was disrupted when she began to fight, and he had needed to change tactics in order to get close. Lulling her towards the tower was the only idea he could muster at the moment.

She was strong here, perhaps even stronger than he. It did not matter to Rayen, his experience would topple her strength. He would lay traps and stay in guises to keep her from his agenda. He considered using her for some of his own schemes. Maybe, he would be able to use this Jasmine, to fulfill his destiny before disposing of her. A smile crept across his lips as he slowly unfolded the plan in his head.

Prisoner

Chains bound the ghastly image to the floor of the obsidian room. The glow from his essence was the only thing making the room visible. Ethereal muscles rippled as he tore at the restraints holding steadfast. Memory slipped from the figure as he continued to wonder how long the desolate room had been occupied by him. No entities, no cellmates, nothing, but an empty, dark room.

After what seemed ages the bound figure stopped struggling. The chains that held his wispy form in place would not be broken.

A deep rumbling pulled his attention from the bindings. The sound emanated from every wall. He couldn't figure it out. *What could make such a noise?* The answer came to him shortly.

Looking out from his stronghold, Rayen could see the shape of a woman approaching his stronghold. It was taking her longer than he had anticipated. He was getting impatient and his plans were slowly being reworked. *Perhaps if I...*

A rumble interrupted his thoughts, Rayen's form suddenly becoming pale. He knew what the sound was. Someone or something was entering the Chamber of the Sheltered, for what reason he could not fathom. The chains that bound Solomon were unbreakable. But just to make sure, Rayen headed towards the center of the stronghold, weary of the intruder and what might be discovered within the depths of the Chamber Bearer's mind.

Escape

The shadows eluded the light with a passion, as the illumination from the torch danced around the endless corridor. Solomon couldn't see his rescuer, only the chain that bound him, pulling him farther away from the chamber of his awakening, further into the darkness.

Solomon found it odd; his hands no longer glowed; they held not his initial form. Perhaps his removal from the prison had granted him substance, and perhaps it was merely his imagination. He couldn't tell, his mind still reeled, taking in all he had witnessed and not understood. Questions haunted him. *Who am I? What am I doing here? Why am I important enough to rescue?* If it weren't for his thoughts he might have been afraid. Instead he was merely curious as to what was happening. Moments ago he was trapped, bound in a chamber by seemingly unbreakable chains. Now he raced down passages being led by a strange woman who had come to rescue him.

The section of wall slid open. The rumbling stopped. Lifting his head up, Solomon peered through the shadows only to see nothing.

"Come, my child," A meretricious voice sauntered in. Solomon felt compelled to move, but the chains held him fast in place.

"Such a shame. I thought that you were stronger than this." The figure moved into the light. The shadows cascading off the robe she wore as she stepped out of the hallway into the lighted chamber. Although the hood protected her face, he could see her hollow blue eyes looking insidiously into his; searching. The woman nodded.

"You are him, regardless." The constraints that held Solomon slacked and he fell forward with a groan as the chains of his imprisonment no longer held him in his stead.

"Stand up," her voice commanding. It seemed to him a travesty to refuse, and he stood even though his body wished to collapse in place. Straining against the forces that wished to pull his body down, Solomon awaited her next command.

The woman wasted no time. Before Solomon had realized it, she held the ends of his bindings in her hands. "Come." She said as she darted out into the depths of darkness.

It was some time before Solomon was brought from his thoughts. The woman had stopped so suddenly that he nearly ran in to her. She was peering down the branches of the fork that had snuck up on Solomon during his brooding. Still hooded, the feminine figure in front of him turned around. For a moment he thought that he could see her blue eyes glowing in the dark, but he disregarded it as his eyes playing tricks on him.

Her eyes held the same intense gaze they held before. The liquid blue seeming to pierce the mask and peer deep inside to what one tried deeply to hide. She always seemed to study, not just watch, but study, as if Solomon held some great answer that the woman wished to drag out of him. If he did hide some magnificent answer, he did not know of it. Solomon hoped that the mysterious figure would let him know what it was within that held her interest, perhaps it was something worth knowing.

"Come." The lady commanded and darted down one of the forks, pulling Solomon even further into darkness, and further into his thoughts.

Bouldering into the chamber Rayen skidded to a halt, he had been at a full paced run since he had heard the doors opening. The rapid thud of his heart beat could be heard echoing throughout the massive and empty chamber. The Chamber Bearer was nowhere to be found.

Quickly Rayen scanned the chamber for entity residue. Surely if someone or something could pull the Everbound chains from the wall, it would be too strong to hide it's signature. Frustration crawled into Rayen's mind, sitting frantically alongside his panic and outrage, as search after search produced no signature to see and no trail to follow.

Rayen slumped against the wall and shuddered. The ante was gone. No longer did he hold the bid for Chamber Mind.

Too many things had distracted him. *That girl. She distracted me. It's her fault that the Chamber Bearer is on the lose and it's her fault that I lost focus.* She would pay; for his damaged pride would not allow such a distraction to exist.

The Approach

Weary and exhausted Jasmine finally stood at the structure she had so endeavoured to reach. The once glowing pillars were now growing dim, a beacon to her wandering-self no more. Looking up she could see the extending expanse of the spires and for the first time she noticed that the lights that floated around the swallowing obsidian were semi-transparent images of human bodies; deformed as if they had been tormented for eons, their forms torn in agony without any emission of sound. They made Jasmine shiver.

After what seemed like several minutes the glow from the obsidian dispersed leaving a fog of light around Jasmine. Feeling the fog embrace her, she spun in wonder and extacy; it was like being embraced by someone else's whole life.

"Jasmine," the fog whispered, "embrace me."

The fog started to wrap around Jasmine tighter.

"Embrace my life," the voice seemed familiar, as if she had heard it before, "you cost me.." it's the voice from before, "my..." the fog wrapped thicker, "plans." the voice now boomed with anger as the fog begun to choke Jasmin. Frantic, she started to thrash and yell at herself, *How could I let this happen again!*

She felt her legs growing weaker as her body began to slump from the suffocating fog. When she finally closed her eyes, releasing herself to the pain all she could see was a blinking white light and then... nothing.

Helpless she drifted. The sea of black engulfing her. She could feel torrents pull her back and forth, like waves at the beach gently pulling. And sometimes, when you

feel you're being pulled one way you're really being pulled another by the ripcurrent. And that tug Jasmine could almost sense.

The rain had once again arisen Jasmine; her face hard pressed against the floor where she had fell. She could taste the lingerings of blood in her mouth. She had bit her lip again.

A slight snoring caught Jasmine's attention and she realized that Vince had decided to stay over, but had neglected to peel her off the floor or wake her. He slept three feet away in an arm chair that he must have brought over.