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Do Not Forsake Me

The shattering of glass, the crumbling of stone, the splintering of beams—all can be heard faintly through the crackle and roar of red that illuminates the countryside. Smoke and ash blot out the stars as winds fuel the flames, a crimson glow weaving through the night. The screams have stopped by now, and come tomorrow, the crackling will have too. The only remnants will be tattered yellow bits coated in grey, clinging to empty masks and bones, fingers grasping at what little bit of hope they can. They hope masks and gold can save them, but their spirits are weak and nothing on this earth can tether them, even gods have no power over this.

“O’ forsake you and your village,” I chant for perhaps the hundredth time, hoisting my cold, steel lantern back onto my pack, its red fire quelling with my touch. “And farewell,” I wrench my shovel from the earth, tapping each of the six miniature grave markers, “for you have paid for your fathers.”

As I breathe the smoke of the chill evening air, my vision returns from red, my lantern’s light no longer tinted. I can feel the weight on me—thinking of all the memories lost for good, thinking that they trusted me. Still, their deaths will make it all easier, for every death will weaken the Yellow Creed’s worship until they give me back who I’ve lost, or otherwise, a door to kill the god who took him from me. Come morning, perhaps their deaths will be worth it. Perhaps their deaths will finally lead me back to Ty.

Tying my shovel to my pack, I kneel before the road—ready for the sun to rise on my own mask, a mask that is not so vestigial. I often have to hood myself to hide it, for the Yellow Creed see it as a blessing—a man with a carved pumpkin for a head, a mask that tethers both soul and soil. They call me The O’kinter-lahn, though I can’t remember what my spirit’s name may have been before this, and they think me a savior—a wick of hope in the darkness. Their disgusting creed is in ruin, their gods scattered and at war, fighting with other creeds across the lowly earth and above. They think I’d save them after what Hallister did to me and those I cared about. They think I’d save them after their god took Ty from me. Some may think he was merely a pet, but to me, he was my greatest friend.

Knees against the gravel, I produce a bottle of oil to refill my lantern’s warm light, ensuring I won’t be travelling in darkness. Pouring the cloudy brown liquid into the bottom, I breathe a sigh. It’ll be a while before I get another moment of silence like this, for many foul creatures walk the night, even if the foulest ones have gone up in flame.

Dirt scrapes behind me, but before I can move, I flinch from the sharp pain in my neck—my pumpkin sliced from my body, leaving my vision black. It tumbles to the earth, but I still hear the heavy breathing of the man behind me and his gasp when I turn around, my stump of a neck crackling and swelling.

It’s growing back, as it always does—a writhing green bulb. Then orange starts to peak through in little veins as it ripens. The growth draws my strength, making my body even wearier as the ridges form and the stem twists, bloating. I stand before the man, listening for movement until I can feel the familiar weight of my head again, but missing its’ most vital features. I unsheathe my knife and turn it on myself. I hear the man recoil with the slice, crack,

and squelch as I carve myself two triangular eyes and a wide, welcoming grin. The innards spill onto the floor in a wet heap, and I sigh, satisfied. There's nothing quite like a fresh face.

"Now, I can see you," I say, my voice like melting wax. He's a knight of the Yellow Creed, cloaked in gold, wielding a sword of iron, trembling behind that useless little mask of his. Over his shoulder, I spot a second knight galloping down the path atop a white-speckled horse, perhaps to warn my next target. It's time to be careful.

"Good evening," I say, sheathing my dagger, "You've really done a number on me, sir. It's been a while since someone's been so bold."

"Don't speak, creature!" He brandishes his sword but seems too afraid to approach me. "Another word and I'll send you back to whatever wretched place you came from!"

This is a feisty one—something I don't have time for. "Listen." I hold my hands in front of me. "If you call back your galloping friend, you two can rebuild your little temple, and your whole village while you're at it. I'll be long gone, and I have no plans of returning."

The man looks down at the six grave markers, and his eyebrows furrow behind his mask. "Look what you've done to our children!" He points his sword. "You're an evil. I've cut you down once, and I'll—"

"I don't care about that anymore," I say, dusting ash from my shoulder. "I'm as good as new. That's the one good thing about being me—I never lose my head."

"Your words are gilded," the man says, approaching me with his sword, looking like he's ready to tear me to pieces. "As is for all false idols."

Though my carved mouth remains, my grin might as well have widened. "It appears you're gilded too, my friend. Let's peel that gold right off you then."

He shouts, swinging his blade in a wide arc, but he's boiling—a sloppy swing. I sidestep, the chain of my lantern rattling. Touching the lantern, I let the red flame rise, consuming my vision once again. This man will make fine fuel.

I reach for the chain, unhooking it from my pack and fling it toward the man in one clean motion. He tries to duck, but his footwork is just as sloppy. With a tug, the lantern on the end swivels, the chain vibrating as it coils around him. He yells, struggling against the iron. The metal rings sing as they spin, encircling him in a red spiral, the fiery maw getting nearer and nearer. At last, he looks up at me, that prideful righteousness in his eyes as the lantern finally strikes his chest.

With a roar and a scream, the man writhes in the red eruption, the inferno moving between his bones and heart—deeper than flesh. I watch as his eyes empty, filling the lantern as he claws at his chest, clinging to that gilded mask just like all the others. O' forsake him, for he was just as vain.

I reach my next target by sunrise, my hood up. This one's much larger than the last; I'd go as far as to call it a small city. Still, it's not difficult to find the stables, and just as I'd feared, a white-speckled horse stands amidst the others, a hay-munching omen. In some ways, it reminds me of Ty's speckled coat, although he was a bit larger than this horse. I sigh, gripping my lantern's handle.

I hope the public has not been made aware of me, but those of the Yellow Creed in this village are certain to be on the watch for a grinning, gourd-headed figure; I shouldn't have given that man a chance; now, this'll be much more tedious. I'll have to scout out the Yellow Creed's

temple here and wait until nightfall. If I'm lucky, this place will have a high priest—someone who has the authority to give me what I want.

I take to the cobbled streets, keeping my head down as those around me go about their business. People haul sacks over their shoulders, walk donkeys pulling loads, and talk amongst themselves in small groups. I soon escape the outer layer of scattered, ramshackle wooden abodes to find myself in a crowded courtyard, vendors and tradesfolk calling from their stalls, many talking much too loudly. One shouts about fresh fruit, another about baked bread. Swimming through the crowd, I spot a stand with bottles of honey—now that's a type of gold I can get behind—one that may return my weary body's strength.

Swift as a starved badger, I slink over to the stall, reaching to snag a jar from the edge while the vendor's distracted with a customer.

Glancing up, I see the vendor and freeze—a stout young woman with a baggy travel jacket that resembles a sun-bleached quilt, her midnight hair pulled back in a bun above her copper spectacles. Though half-concealed, two crescent-shaped sickles rest at either hip, her signature weapons. She smiles at a customer, handing them a jar before she turns to see me, an icicle from her past about to crystallize the warm honey of her heart. Linh's eyes go wide when she sees me, her mouth opening in a perfect circle as she gapes at me with my hood up.

“Kynn!” she shouts with a smile, bouncing to engulf me in the flowery patterns of her jacket. Though she's a foot shorter than me, she squeezes like a bear, looking up with her big, bespectacled eyes. “It's been so long!”

Her face soon shifts to one of concern. “You've carved your face again.” She gently reaches out to touch the edge of my new mouth.

“It's okay,” I say, gently grabbing her hand.

She pushes my hand away. “It looks like you were rushed.” Her expression is worse than the decapitation, part of the reason I swore I’d never see her—the last of my family—until after I got Ty back.

“I’m fine. Just some monsters. You can’t really avoid them at night.”

“Then, why are you travelling at night, Kynn?” she asks, putting her hands on her hips. I can hardly believe she’s acting like we saw each other just yesterday. She reaches behind her and shoves a jar of honey into my arms. “Here, eat up, Planty. It’s not every day my honey gets to heal someone. It looks like you’ve found me at the perfect time.”

In truth, “perfect” is certainly not the word I’d use. Fear tingles in the brambles beneath my cloak as I think of Linh among these weak, gold-clinging gnats that fill this city, fuel for the flame.

“You’re here for the market?” I ask, tilting the jar.

“Well, yeah,” she says. “What do you think I’ve got a stand for?”

“I mean, are you living in the city?”

“Oh, I’m on the outskirts,” she smiles, pointing off into the distance. “Over that way!” Her face flattens. “Kynn, are you gonna drink your honey, or do I have to open it for you?”

I unscrew the bottle, taking a sip. Within seconds, I feel the nectar coursing through me, giving me back some of the energy I’d lost regrowing my head.

“How did you even survive without me?” Lihn tuts, shaking her head.

“Listen, I can’t stay for long.”

“What? You haven’t even seen my new house yet! You’d lov—”

“Linh,” I say. “You can’t stay for long either. This city’s about to get a lot more dangerous.”

She narrows her eyes. “What do you mean?”

I tense. “It—It’s the Yellow Creed’s fault.”

Knitting her brows, she touches my shoulder. “Oh, Kynn, I know you’re always worried about the Yellow Creed, but this city’s fine. We banished Hallister, and with his lantern destroyed—”

“Just trust me on this one,” I say. “Please find a different place to stay tonight.” My hand instinctively finds its way to the chain of my lantern, and I watch Linh’s eyes follow. I shift my cloak to try hiding it. “Go out and camp like we used to—anything to get away from here.”

Hesitation dances between her eyebrows, but she eventually squints, biting the corner of her lip. “Fine, I’ll pack up now.”

I’m not sure if I believe her, but I nod. “Thank you,” I say. “I hope I’ll see you again soon.”

I almost drop the bottle as she hugs me again, squeezing as if to make sure I’m really here, or really me. I squeeze her back, much more gently, and I feel her take a deep breath.

“Here,” she says, and she reaches into her shirt to pull out a coin-sized brass compass on a tiny chain she unclasps from around her neck. “It points to my new home.” She presses the compass into my hand. “Now you’ll definitely see me again soon.”

I nod the best I can manage, tucking the bottle of honey into my pack, gripping the metal against my glove.

Linh gives a gentle smile back, and as she begins to gather her things, I rejoin the crowd, keeping my hood high and head down to avoid attention. Still, I find myself drawn to the tiny hunk of metal in my hand, staring down at the little thing, its red arrow pointing the same direction Linh had.

I wish I was like her—someone who could just build a new home, someone who could start anew. I picture the kind of house she may have built for herself all the way out here—probably a spruce cabin, knowing Linh, with a fireplace and a view. I can imagine her orchards of trees she nursed from saplings, her spanning flower gardens and crafted homely beehives. She always liked simple living, I think because our lives were anything but back then. Now, however, things are simple enough.

I tuck the compass into my pocket, setting my head back on straight. Before me, this city's Yellow Temple towers, and the sight elates me more than Linh's honey ever could. It rises with ceilings twice as tall as any I'd seen before, spires that must travel the height of four stacked houses, and glass windows tinted in shining golds that glimmer in the afternoon sunlight: a temple fit for a high priest.

I find myself gripping my lantern's handle. I can already imagine the sight of this building burning with the red flames of my lantern, emptying this golden shell and leaving behind a husk just as hollow as it ever was.

Four knights guard the large wooden doors, staring straight ahead as the people of the city pass this way and that. No matter; the front door is hardly exciting anyway. I'm sure there are plenty of other interesting ways in.

I creep around the corner of the temple across the cobbled street that winds around it. All signs of nature have been removed here, replaced with the man-carved rock and timber that make up this place. I pass several oxidized statues of men standing tall in robes and masks, some wielding scepters, others wielding swords and shields, all with lips tight in prideful expression. I spot a few smaller doors along the walls, but each has a guard standing watch.

The temptation to take one out and march inside tugs at my cloak, but I keep searching, following the arches of delicate glass, stones, and beams. Eventually, around the back side of the temple between two spires, I find a corner darker than the rest. Two knights guard this back entrance, both with the same iron spears, golden armor, and masks as the others, but each wears a black sash. These guards are special. Whether they're highly ranked, specially trained, or perhaps part of an honor guard, I know I've found my entrance.

The sun nears evening, so I find a spot to sit on the street corner, just outside any guard's view, and sip on my bottle of honey. I watch with care as the sun declines, the black sashes adamant in their post. This doesn't mean the streets are silent, however—far from it. The hollow village folk bustle and tread past and around the temple, some stopping to kneel before it for a few moments, others merely gazing at it in reverence as they go about their day. Nearby, a group of children play happily, bound to be scolded for not respecting such a monument before them. In a way, the temple is a monument to immortal children—beings who only toy with mortals for their own amusement. The only difference—they have no parents to fix the toys they break.

As I watch them, sipping my honey, one of the kids stops in place, staring in wonder, my head out of sight for most adults. The boy who saw me whispers to his friends and several begin to look afraid, sneaking glances at me. He furrows his brow, to argue, as if to defend me. So, they are scared. I should have been more careful. If kids have heard of the last village, the rumors must be spreading like wildfire. Still, the first boy has a twinkle about his eyes as he talks to the others, certainly sharing his wild dreams of their savior—a magical pumpkin-man to make their parents' crops grow bountifully, to make all of their worries disappear.

A subtle twinge rattles me to my core, and I'm drawn to reach into my pocket. I grip the little brass compass; did it move? The other children don't seem convinced. No, it couldn't have moved. I pull my hand free and take a deep breath.

These kids can't warn the temple about me. Hiding it with my cloak, I pull off my glove, reaching my viny hand into the cobbled street, letting the tendrils extend into the dirt beneath. I connect with the soil, concentrating as I reach deeper and deeper.

I inhale, and as I look up again, flowers have sprouted from the cobble all around the children's feet. They look in amazement at the dandelions, poppies, cornflowers, then at me. I give a soft nod as I pull my hand back from the soil, returning it to its glove.

The children's fear vanishes in a puff of smoke, and many of them begin to pick the flowers. The boy smiles, looking a little more self-important than before, his back a little straighter, and I know I've just created another gilded monster.

The temple's stained glass begins to glow from within, yellow candles illuminating the halls just before sunset, spilling onto the plaza outside; perhaps they hope that the light will prevent the night. Still, the sun's rays fall over the horizon, and if this temple doesn't give me what I want, these will be the last rays that ever fall upon it.

I finish my bottle of honey and drop the glass to the ground, letting it shatter against the stone in sparkling shards. I grip my lantern as I make my way to the black-sashed knights.

"You!" one shouts when he spots my form in the darkness. "Are you tossing bottles against the Yellow Temple?"

I raise one hand. "I've come to see your priest," I say.

"At this hour?" the second knight asks. "Go back to your home, drunkard."

I persist. "I must meet with your high priest." I continue toward them.

“The Cleric does not see anyone so late,” the first knight says. “Please vacate the premises or we’ll be forced to remove you.”

“Let’s just knock out the madman before he stabs anyone with a broken bottle,” the second says, raising the blunt end of his spear.

“What did you just call me?” I ask, inching just a bit closer.

“You deaf, too?” the second says with a laugh. “You must really be out of your skull.”

I chuckle, and my vision turns a ravenous red once again, ready to add more fuel to the flame. “You mean to say...” I lift my lantern to flare in a crimson glow, letting my hood fall loose to reveal my permanent grin. “I’m out of my gourd?”

The first knight springs at me, his spear soaring faster than an arrow. I bounce to the side, letting his thrust spear only air. Before the second can turn his spear back around, I grab the first’s and tug, pulling him forward. He stumbles toward me, and I close the distance. In one movement, I raise my lantern and backhand him across the jaw. His neck cracks sideways, and he screams, the flames gnawing into him.

The second whips his spear around with a shout, about to poke me a third eye. I shift to the side, trying to use the first knight as a shield, but it plunges into my shoulder. I cry out, my vision turning redder. He pushes against me, the agonizing metal tip digging deeper. My back hits the stone wall, and I see the malice in his face, his friend falling to his knees as the flames overtake him.

I yank the chain of my lantern and send it under the spear, tugging it to curve the momentum. It begins to wrap around the spear shaft, each vibration tearing at my shoulder. The guard looks on in fear as the flames begin to spread up the shaft, and he lets go, stepping back. I

wrench the spear from my shoulder with an excruciating tug and spin it into his chest, skewering the second black-sashed knight.

I let go of the spear and he falls to the ground in a heap, the shaft falling with him. I loose my lantern from the shaft, pulling the chains off the end, and I kneel before the impaled man. His breathing is slow, every breath a weak gasp. He grabs at his chest and his eyes lose focus, but before I can go, I set him alight.

“O’ forsake you,” I say, “for you got in my way.”

The red flames overtake him, draining and leaving that thin layer of gold on the ground. Two guards, and all they could do was pierce my shoulder. I take a deep breath, drawing on the strength the honey gave me to fill the gap. A few seconds of high-pitched crackling and I’m rolling my green, tendrilled shoulder as if nothing happened.

I push my way through the back entrance, opening the wooden door with a creak. Behind is a drawing room—sofas and small tables spread across a lavish carpet, lit only by the red light of my lantern. To the left is a door that appears to lead out into the temple’s hall, but straight ahead is another door, this one painted white with an engraved gold knob, candlelight spilling from underneath. This must be The Cleric’s chambers.

Swift, I move to open the door, quiet and soft. Inside is a luxurious canopy bed atop another, equally lavish, carpet. In the corner of the room, a white-haired man sits in a white nightgown, reading a book.

“I thought I said I was not to be disturb—” He looks up at me and his eyebrows raise. “Oh, it’s you,” he says, and he closes his book. He studies me as I enter, gripping my lantern tight. “I suppose you’ve come to ravage my city, or so my knights seem to believe.”

“If you give me what I want, I’ll have no need,” I say.

“Then, what is it that you want?” He sets his book down on the table beside him and rises from his seat. “I doubt money, or you would have ransacked the place, and I can’t imagine you’ve come here for a blessing.”

“I seek to enter the Yellow Court,” I say, stepping forward. “I’ve lost something that I wish returned to me.”

“Ah, now I see why you’ve come all this way.” He grabs the candle on his nightstand and walks right past me, not a glimpse of fear in his eyes.

I feel the crimson within bubbling over, and I grab his shoulder. “Don’t walk away from me, Cleric.” I spit the last word, an insult. “Will you open a door to the Yellow Court?”

He narrows his eyes at me, his old face wrinkled from all the years of pride. “I cannot, but you may be able to.”

I let go of him. What is this old bat on about? He continues out of his bedchamber, and I follow him closely as he exits the drawing room into the main hall. The hall is lit by soft yellow candles, illuminating rows of stone seats for visitors to gaze upon the larger altar in the back of the room where I stand now with The Cleric. I follow him up the stairs, but he passes the altar and goes to the very back of the raised platform to stand before a massive velvet curtain. I’m certain he’ll make a run for it any second.

He reaches for a tassel attached to the curtain and pulls with all the might his old body can muster. The curtains slide aside, rustling across a strange material. Behind the curtains is an empty frame the size of a barn, made from a rough, glistening stone that sparkles with gold and white.

“Nearly three years ago, our God was banished,” The Cleric says. “We do not know why, or by whom, but that day froze this gateway shut.” He takes a deep breath. “Once, we could

merely light a spark to ignite the gateway for a short time, allowing us council with the Yellow Court, but now, a greater sacrifice is required.” He gestures toward the crimson lantern in my hand, the flames still laughing within.

I chuckle. “Willing to sacrifice your own people, your own believers to meet your god again?”

The Cleric nods, but before he can say another word, I strike the frame with my lantern, letting the flames fly. The red fire laps at the sides of the strange stone, burning, but only barely.

I scoff, pulling my lantern back. “Do you know what I do to liars, Cleric?”

His eyes meet mine, confident for such a weak, gilded old man. “The sacrifice is not great enough. More lives must be granted for the door to be reopened.”

Now, I get what he means. “You people really are monsters,” I laugh.

The Cleric’s brow furrows. “Any true member of the Yellow Creed would gladly give up their life to reattune with our lost God! Their sacrifices will be worth it in the end.”

“Well, if this whole city’s gotta go,” I feel myself grinning beyond my carving, “I guess you wouldn’t mind being the first.” I throw my lantern at him, the crimson trailing behind as it soars toward The Cleric’s stunned, wide eyes.

A metal clang resounds through the hall, and my lantern is knocked off course as a form lands from the ceiling’s beams above, wielding two crescent sickles. Her midnight hair crowns her narrowed, bespectacled eyes, sharp as her sickles, aimed at me.

The Cleric falls over behind her with a yelp, tumbling off the platform down the stairs in a heap, leaving me face-to-face with Linh, her lips tight in a look of betrayal.

“I thought they were just rumors,” Linh says, “but you really kept that wretched thing?” She points one of her sickles at my lantern as I reel it back in, gripping it tighter than I’ve ever

before. A tear drips down her cheek. Linh had always been an emotional one, and I knew she'd never understand.

"I told you to leave, Linh," I say, watching frame's weak flames extinguish.

"And I did," she says, her voice cracking, "but something felt off; you felt off, Kynn."

"I've been off since the day we lost them!" I shout, "not that you cared!"

Linh sniffs and furrows her brow. "How dare you?" She leaps at me, her sickles flying swifter than my lantern could ever. She knocks it away with a spark, sending the chain coiling around my leg. I draw my knife to block a downward blow, but she tugs the chain just as our blades meet, dropping me to my knees.

"You were never our best fighter, Kynn," she says, her teeth bearing.

"Neither were you." I slam my now-healed shoulder into her gut, sending her to trip over the chain still caught on my leg. She barely manages to stay on her feet, but gives me plenty of time to reorient myself.

Linh takes another step back, falling into a familiar stance. She's about to dive right at me again. "At least I carry their memory," she shouts. "You still have their drained corpses in that disgusting lantern. How could you use it?"

I scream, and the lantern's crimson erupts. If she's gonna dive, let her come. I throw my lantern directly at her, the iron rattling behind as it soars. It comes mere inches from her nose before I realize it's a feint. She drops one of her sickles as she slides to the left, letting the lantern zip by her. She grabs the chain and tugs it taught, lifting her other sickle into the air. Glinting in the candlelight, the sickle's steel meets the chain's iron with a snap.

The lantern flies off the platform, the light returning to yellow as my vision returns from red. I feel faint, my body overcome with an ache I cannot understand. My chain falls to the floor,

and I reach for the lantern. I begin to run to it, to make sure it's okay, but before I make it three steps, Linh forces the same sickle through my chest.

I grunt, "No," I say. "Let me go. I've gotta bring—"

Linh grabs my hand and tugs me closer, her steel protruding from my back. "Kynn, you can't bring them back!" Her watery eyes pierce me deeper than her sickles ever could.

"You don't think I know that?" I ask. "I'm not trying to bring them back!"

Her grip tightens, her stare a pair of oceans. "Aren't you?"

Every inch of my green, viny body tenses, each thorn under my clothes prickling upward, even those in my hands sprouting through my gloves. Still, Linh's grip tightens, her palm's blood staining. No, not them—him.

Somehow, I understand her gift now, though I didn't bother with it at the time. I reach into my pocket, pulling the small brass compass free. The tiny red arrow points to Linh, not to her home, and she looks as if she's trying to smile for me. I grunt as I press against the clasp, opening the small device.

Inside the locket is a miniature photo of me, Linh, and all our friends—our family. It's faded, but I can still make out my old face, a compassionately carved one, and Linh's infectious smile in the middle of all our family. Then, I see the rest of them: the goofy grin of Old Bert—his arms around me and Linh, then, the sanctimonious smirk of Philus, one eyebrow raised as he poses for the camera, then, the bright beam of Carrie, caught mid-jump as she bounces across the frame, and finally, Ty, his massive furry form lying on the grass beside us all, his tail curled in the air.

"I know we weren't there for Ty, but he's gone, Kynn, just like all the others."

"Let me go," I say, pulling my hand, and I feel the warm liquid spreading.

“If I’d known this is what you were trying to do, I never would have let you leave.”

I squeeze her hand, pressing the thorn deeper into her palm. “There’s still a chance,” my voice creaks.

“I’m sorry, Kynn, but you have to accept it.” She looks down. “We all saw the scorch marks on his fur.” She might as well have twisted the sickle in my chest. “Ty’s gone.”

I drop to my knees, and she sets my hand free, her blood coating my glove; the color reminds me of him—his smoking body lying in the sand, his speckled grey fur with red that doesn’t belong. My whole body trembles as I let my hands sink onto the stone, reaching for something deeper. I quiver as the fear finally overcomes me, permeating every ounce of everything I have—the greens and browns finally mingling with whatever’s inside of me, whatever I am. Drops of water fall from my sunken eyes, leaving marks on the floor like a miniature raincloud would. I feel words wanting to flow forth, but they won’t come out. I want to say something, do something, be something else. I want to fix it.

With the cleave of a sickle, my head drops like a cloud, joining the tears it left—setting them free.

My neck’s stump starts to writhe just as it always does, but this time, Linh lays me on my back, and I hear the gentle scrap of steel on stone as she picks up her sickle. As soon as my head is back, I feel her carve into me, her other hand resting on my head, giving comfort. She delicately carves out my eyes, kind ones, and I see her give me a teary smile as she moves onto the mouth. She imposes her love over me, recalling the face I had in that old picture—the face I had before I lost it.