

BILLY 1

"HRGH!" *Chhnk.*

"HRGH!" *Chhnk.*

"HRGH!" *Chhnk.*

Tough, rough, hands, colonized by puss and calluses, swung a iron head against chipped rock. A flickering lamp intermittently illuminated the concave rock face.

"HRGH!" *Chhnk.*

Rapid breaths collapsed the space. The hands dropped the pickaxe, and a small echo rung through the cave walls. Its former holder, a disheveled, gaunt man with a hard, sunken face, collapsed one sleeved arm against the rock face. His face was covered dust, scars, and a bitter grimace, but all that somehow seemed like makeup overtop an actually youthful face.

A few more deep inhales calmed his breath to a silent pace. He stared down at the indents where his pickaxe had previously lit sparks.

CRK! He HOWLED and his back popped open, his chest and neck nearly hitting the sharp cave wall.

CRACK! He screamed again and spun around. Two whip lashes had come from behind, held by a stocky foreman with a wide, round jaw. The foreman stepped forward, and shoulder lifted barely to prepare another swing--

The lamp from the light snuffed. Instead, a red hot rock glowed between the fingers of the miner.

"Raise that whip again and I'll kill ya."

His voice was gravely, his vocal cords so dry and stretched that it sounded as if multiple people were speaking at once, as though the dead were speaking.

"You idiot," the foreman grunted. He lurched forward--

The miner chucked the glowing rock at the tunnelface where the foreman was standing. At the last second he whipped his wrist, as if purposefully redirecting the throw.

The red rock slammed into the rockface, a body's length away from the foreman. The tunnel shook. Rubble exploded from the roof. The foreman's howls crashed through the tunnel.

Grunting in the pitch blackness.

"You-- dirty-- bastard--"

Rocks crunched together. Feet shifted against the gravelly floor.

HWPP! The crack of the whip echoed through the air.

FTSKKkkk. A flame brought itself to life and expanded from a match in the foreman's fingers. A yellow smile came across his dust-covered face.

"You're gonna wish you had the balls to kill me," the foreman said.

HWPP! *HWPP!* *HWPP!*

Scream after scream of agony echoed down the halls of the mineshaft.

:Comment:

add names here, kinda confused who we're following

:END:

The miner limped towards the light at the exit of the mine.

Both his hands clutched his biceps, like he was shivering, giving himself a desperate hug. Raw, red wounds covered his face and arms, and his jaw and the bottom of his eyes hung open like a zombie. At the entrance of the tunnel, he met another foreman, this one thin and mechanical, at a wooden booth. He turned to the foreman with desperate, hollow, shaky eyes.

"No pay today. Actually what you did will be four weeks off your pay," the foreman said nonchalantly, staring down at papers, not even addressing the miner.

The miner stared there, shivering, like a starving child hoping for a morsel of solace. The foreman finally glanced up at him with a scowl.

"You're lucky, you know? We could've fired you, or put you in jail. He could have beaten you to death and we could've said it was a mining accident. You should thank us."

The miner clenched his jaw. Underneath the tiredness and desperation, was a seed of hatred.

"Say thank you."

The miner kept glaring at the foreman.

"Say it."

The miner turned away, and kept limping on. After he had made it some distance, he heard a shout from the booth.

"That's another week off your pay! The next five weeks, you come in, no pay!"

He continued to trudge on in the cold, bleak desert, a good mile to a small wooden town illuminated by lampposts.

The door slammed open, and the miner collapsed into the cramped, creaky wooden bedroom.

Cramped between the low roof and the top of a bunk bed, a thin teenager, though he barely looked it, plopped up, his long hair flowing over his face like a poofy tree. The room felt like it was more fit to store a few brooms than two people; both a rickety bed and drawer squeezed between red wood planks.

The miner went right for a bottle of rum atop the drawer. He chugged it. The strong burn of the liquor washed away the pain which pricked at every inch of his body, and he exhaled.

He turned to the teen atop the bunk, who had been staring at him this whole time. Though he was obviously interested in the miner, illuminated by flickering candlelight, his small form dissappeared into the dark wooden walls, and he seemed invisible.

"No nightmares, right?" the miner asked as he collapsed against the wall, nursing the bottle. It creaked against the weight of his back. The teen shook his head no.

"Good", the disheveled man smiled with soot-filled teeth. In this intimate space, despite the ugliness of all the grime, blood, and fresh wounds on his face, he had a noticeable ruffian charm; the sort that one's heart would yearn to trust even though they know they shouldn't.

"What happened?" the teen asked with a voice like what a kitten would have if one could talk.

"Nothing," the miner said defiantly. He cleared his throat and returned with a smile to the boy.

"Work's still good?"

The thin teenager paused. He shrugged. His eyes were still wide with concern at the wounded miner.

The disheveled man nodded. He paced against the squeaking wood, gesticulating, stuck in his own world.

"I finally got a musket to hide underneath that loose plank the against wall with that painting over it," the man said in his usual scratchy rasp. The teen looked up at the man, a pained look on his face. The man clenched his jaw; he knew that the teen knew that it was stolen, and that though the teen used to the man's theivery, was uncomfortable with it.

"It's gonna get busier this time of year," the man continued. "Now there's a way for you to defend yourself safely no matter what you're up against."

"I-I really don't think it's gonna get that much busier," the boy replied. "Mister G hardly has any customers. Just some old guys. And, I don't even know if they're customers... they don't seem to buy anything."

:comment:

Are the customers supposed to be like gods or a mystery for the reader to ask abt?

:END:

The man scratched his chin. "It must get busier in this season. How else does he make his money?"

The teenager shrugged again.

"Maybe he's the one we need to look out for. Damn it. I hate I have to leave you alone here, Damin," the man scrunched his lips. "Is there any way we can get into his little room?"

Damin's eyes darted around. "Maybe we shouldn't. I mean we've been here a month, and his price is fair. He probably wouldn't like us snooping around. After all we've--" he replied.

"I know, I know," the man said. "It's just-- if he does anything-- anything weird at all--"

"I'll tell you, Billy," Damin said nonchalantly.

Billy sighed. Damin kept staring at Billy with his hands lazily crossed in between his legs.

"I've decided," Billy paced around the room, clinking the bottom of the bottle with his fingers as the teenagers' eyes followed him. "I'm gonna do the duel."

For the first time, Damin sprung awake. "No no no no. Why would you do that? We're finally safe again!"

"I know," Billy said. "But I also know I can win. I finally-- got us a working musket. And it's a lot of money."

"You don't care just about money. If you cared about money, we would've found another circus, or joined a gang. You-- you care about us being safe," Damin said. "About us staying alive! And that's good!" The boy looked up to Billy.

"Money is us staying alive. And more importantly, it's enough for *the trip*," Billy towered over Damin. His hand shook with an unstable passion.

"Billy," Damin sighed, burying his face in his ragged leather shirt. "*That's* a pipe dream. It's in *two weeks*. And we've got nothing."

Billy hated being reminded of time, not that he didn't think of it. The bottom of Damin's bunk was covered with etches counting the days. It all felt like a slow march to death, until the rare morsels where he received a taste of a chance at enough money to get out of here, and fulfilled the promise he made to himself nearly a decade ago. "Exactly! We've been *fucked* every time, and finally something just lands in front of us. It's more than enough money for food, supplies, and two trips for two people. I asked Benjy. And I can *win*."

"How do you know that?" Damin shook his head. "And how do you even know Parsmo'll pick you?"

"Cause I'm a Herald? And the best shot in the city, by far?" Billy raised his hands, like it was a truism.

"Parsmo doesn't know that. Parsmo didn't see you at the circus," Damin retorted. Billy's grip on the bottle turned white. The only thing he hated more than being reminded of how much time had passed was being reminded of the events during the time itself. What he had lost, what they had fumbled, even if it wasn't enviable. But he didn't have time to be angry now: *salvation* was near.

"Parsmo's shrewd. He's having tryouts just before the duel, and I'll win," Billy had counted all the men in town and knew that none had a shot on him, and none would expect Heraldry tricks.

"Callaghan's more shrewd," Damin shot back. "How do you know you're not going up against the best Subject Herald in the state?"

Billy bit his lip. "Yeah, Subject's good, but they always think like they're against other Subjects or other normals. They just try to draw as quick as possible and win off the bat. No one expects Light."

"And what if you screw up?" Damin challenged Billy with his quiet voice. "What if they draw first, and kill you--"

"I-I'll negotiate with Parsmo to pay a doctor if I get injured, whether I lose or win. And guarantee payment--"

"Yeah right. He's the boss, not you. He'll take someone else. And even if he doesn't, so what? I'll have enough money to bury my brother?" Damin's eyes watered.

A fiery rage burst inside Billy's heart, and then was quenched by Damin's tears... and then burst again. He /needed/ that money, he needed to have the opportunity to do what he had been thinking of for the past decade in every waking moment-- but he couldn't leave his brother alone if things went bad. He looked down, crushed. "I'm sorry. You're right." The disheveled man scrunched his fist and slumped against the wall.

The two brothers stared at each other with dead eyes, both their bodies collapsed.

"I just want to see him. I promised five... and now it's ten..." Billy's hands shook.

"I know," Damin leaned forward, reachinng out a hand--

"FUCK!" Billy spun around to smash the bottle of whiskey against the floor. Damin jumped back onto the bed and shielded his eyes.

"Sorry", Billy sighed. He crouched up towards the bed. He winced at the short, muffled pantings.

"S-sorry, Damin."

Damin kept his back towards Billy. With a hint of panic, Billy lifted up the candle and stuck its aura of glow near the trembling boy.

"You're not... *it's* not happening, is it?" Billy's voice trembled.

Damin shook his head, though he stayed turned away from Damin. Billy's shoulders relaxed.

"Get some sleep, I'll clean it up," Billy said as he set down the candle.

Billy pulled the raggedy blanket over the teenager. Damin stayed with the blanket stretched over him awkwardly, his fingers holding the top above his neck.

"I've got no pay for five weeks," Billy said. "No matter what we want, I gotta do that duel and we gotta get outta here."

Damin said nothing, but Billy knew the boy was scared.

With a deep sigh, Billy got on his knees and picked up the shards of glass one by one.

OKIN I

"...and instill your Bravery in each of these men's hearts, every one, especially those of your Light, so that none may be deterred either by fickle emotions or the Vices of the One and the Five."

The square-faced man took a pause from his whispers. The flame sang a rhythm under his breathe. He remained hunched over with his arms raised in a reverent kneel in the corner of the room. His palms shouted to the ceiling above.

"And if I may ask again, that you may instill that same Bravery into my heart, not for my achievement, nay, but for my Arising to you."

His golden silk sleeves lowered from their raised position until his arms were clasped against his chest. His left index finger traced an invisible line over the back of his right palm, connecting to a line of golden paint already there.

"Bravery", he said under his breathe.

He raised his finger and brought it back in place to repeat the motion.

"Bravery."

Again, and again.

SLAM! The door, feet from him, smashed against the wall. The square-faced man jumped. He swung around. He raised his arms in an awkward stance; it barely intelligible that it was a defensive one.

They lowered, along with his wide eyes, as he noticed his intruder. From a violent shake, his body gradually stilled.

"Devinar Previa!" he said. "What is the meaning of this?!"

"S-sorry, Okin," an adolescent, crooked smile and slight blush appeared on Previa's face.

Okin shook his head. "I know your father taught you not to disturb a man during his prayers. So I must conclude that this is just carelessness on your part. And that's ATHAR Okin to you."

Previas rolled his eyes. "Since Krusadar Caldros is gone, I was more focused on maintaining the chain of command," he said. "You know me, it's hard to focus on more than one thing to remember at a time... and there's something much more important to remember than that."

Okin raised an eyebrow. He knew Previa was clumsy, the distinction between the Rothar's recklessness and Okin's meticulousness was made by several teachers ever since they were kids. But he knew that whenever Previa was being humble, something was amiss...

"Maldin tracked the Farsunni who captured Islovol's squad. We're gonna get 'em back!" Previa's eyes lit up.

Okin's eyes narrowed on Previa-- his hunches were never wrong when it came to his old friend. The young man's childish declarations always poked something inside him.

"That is Krusadar Caldoro's decision to make," Okin replied. He turned back to the candlelit corner, even though he knew that it wouldn't be the end of the conversation.

Previa looked at the back of Okin's head with wide eyes. He stepped to the right so his shout was basically in Okin's ear. "They'll be killed by then!"

Okin's stare didn't flinch from the light in the corner. "As much as it pains both of us, if they wanted to kill them, they'd be dead by now."

Previa shook his head. He turned away and opened the door again. "Every second we wait, is a second they're more likely to be killed by those monstrous heretics. If you're saying that, and they're still alive, then their blood is on our hands!"

Previa turned back to Okin. "Isn't it in Bravery that we risk our lives to save those that need us?"

Okin's lips pursed. His harsh stare softened, and his shoulders shrunk. *Bravery.* He felt his finger against the back of his hand again. *Bravery. Bravery.*

"No." Okin's sternness returned to him. "It is in Temperance and Truth that remain patient, that we get more information about the Farsunni outpost, and most importantly that we follow the orders of Krusadar Caldoro to remain on the defensive."

Previa turned and ran like a petulant child, the door sputtering shut on his way out.

"Previa!" Okin shouted chasing his friend out the door and into the hallway. Previa was quick, and Okin just made out the end of the young man's leather boots turning down one of the fortress' stone brick hallways ahead.

Okin looked down to his unathletic rounders. He grit his teeth and made off, his awkward, intense strides being made by the softness of his rounders and flowing Athar's robes made him look comedic, and he knew it, but he had to catch Previa.

As Okin turned down the hallway Previa had, the young man was nowhere in sight. His footsteps could be heard in the distance but the echo diminished. Still, Okin kept running, he knew where Previa was headed.

The Ather passed out from the stone halls into the fortress' central courtyard. Devinars in polished armour spared with each other or ran drills. Okin heard his name called in greeting as he passed. He gave the voices a slight nod as he tried to keep pace.

Previa had disappeared in the crowd, but Okin didn't need to see him. He passed through an archway at the opposite end of the courtyard sprinting into the barracks. He passed the Krusadar's private rooms and the Devinar's dormitories. Pass the officer's mess and towards the armory used by Caldoro's unit.

Okin's burst through the wooden door. Before even shoulder-checking it open, he could hear the clank of iron boots being fastened and swords being sharpened.

THUD. He burst through, before instantly grasping his forearm in pain. However, he was given no attention, the few dozen soldiers scattered around the benches were focused on hastily equipping their armor, and clamoring with a mess of different chants.

He was shoved aside by an armed soldier already leaving the barracks.

His eyes urgently danced around the room for Previa. The young soldier had armor like an alien quartz statue, shimmering with an austere beauty. It was not painted steel, but a material of its own, like a glowing pearl.

The row of soldiers marching out past him, the clanging of the iron boots, made Okin and shrink. He snapped at himself for his Cowardice, and straightened his posture before marching up to Previa.

"Stop them!" Okin shouted. Even with the commotion, he knew Previa heard him, though it was easy for the young soldier to pretend that he didn't with his visor totally hiding his face, and towering armor supporting it a whole head over Okin.

"I thought you said you wished to maintain the chain of command! I command you to stop them!" Okin got up next to Previa's shoulder and shouted upwards.

Previas turned, his blue eyes just barely visible as he stared down at Okin between the white visor.

"And you always tell me that all men are truly ruled by the Four, and should be guided by their Virtues. So I am doing just that."

Previas fully turned and hilted his long steel sword. He tilted his head up so his eyes were gone, and again he was like a magnificent white statue. He took a step forward that shook the ground.

Technically, maybe, Okin could keep standing in his way; Previa was the one going against command, and it would be a true crime to attack Okin, and Okin knew that though the adolescent was brash. But he could not do it, his instincts took over to step aside and let the moving white tower thunder past him.

After Previa had noticeably left the room, the rest of the men who were still inside the barracks rushed themselves and each other to follow him, clumsily putting on boots or still having their helmets tucked under their arms. Okin should've stopped them, he had the authority to, but was frozen, and could only let out small utterances.

He followed them out, stuck in between two armored men; he knew, on paper, they knew who he was, his Athar's robes told them that, and he had even counseled them before, but now they were locked into war, and he was just an object to get past. The colossal raindrops of their pounding boots drowned out his thinking; he didn't really know what he was doing, just that he had to do SOMETHING.

After turning down another hall dimly lit by torches, the white stream of the world burst onto him. Three hallways met upon a massive iron door which had been pulled open, through which the stream of soldiers marched out of.

As he ran through, the soldiers behind him swarming past, Okin scrunched his nose at the kiss of the hot air. The soldiers climbed atop their horses, those who were ahead circled or doubled back and forth to channel the energy they were amping up. Okin looked around for an empty horse, but it seemed that just as he thought one was unreserved, it was taken. Finally, he just ran up to the group of trotting mounting soldiers. As he approached, their walks became more ordered, until they were totally circling around one figure in the middle, and it felt like a defensive shell against Okin. The figure in the middle was that white obelisk glimmering under the bloody morning sun, the mounted Previa.

Previas raised his fist. Okin froze, and the circle opened on the opposite side of the Athar, and Previa's horse trotted out ahead before stopping, the rest of the circle curving to line up behind him. Once they had, he turned his horse back to the squadron. He opened his visor, revealing his thin but energetic face, and raised his armored fist again.

"The energy in the barracks has been morose. We came here to FIGHT Darkness in strength in the open promise we made to The Citadel as Devinars, not slowly watch our friends die and be captured and hear that they burned down another village of our faithful, and capture our brothers, many of who you have been mourning. But-- you have mourned falsely. They are not dead. Now, here, is our chance to fulfill our promise! Open your visors, brothers! Let me see your smiles, let me see your passion!"

The men howled, and most followed and opened their visors. Okin understood the passion. Many of them had been disappointed by the brutal, yet slow pace of the war; instead of glorious battles, it was characterized by ugly raids, by strategically sound but dishonorable uses of attrition. And though the enemy teased them by setting camps a mere ride from their bases, the message from high command was always to hunker down, prepare, and play the long game. But here, standing with his sword raised, was an opportunity for these young men to earn the glory they came here for.

"When you draw your sword today, men of Nexon, let me see your Joy! Men of Olitheon, show me your Sacrifice! Men of Intillia, show me your Discipline! Men of Aredal, show me your Bravery!" Their swords sprung from their hilts, and their passion sprung from their hearts. Even though Okin was trying, in vain, to stop this, the strong summoning of brotherhood gave him, as it would any man, the urge to support this valiant effort, even when Okin knew it came from an otherwise forgetful, foolish boy-- in that white armor, on that horse, that boy was gone. A soldier, a leader remained.

"This is not some dishonorable raid, some backhanded pillage like those animals did to the innocent towns on our front! It is snatching our loyal brothers from the venomous jaws of Darkness! And if you are here to fight for your brothers, then RIDE WITH ME!"

Previa raised his sword again. The rest of the men did in unison.

"VIR VERSALIS!" The men shouted. "VIR CITADEL! VIR VOUR!"

The men hilted their weapons, then screamed and whipped their horses into a sprint. Previa raised his sword even higher to the sky.

Okin was thrust out of the moment-- he was here to stop this. But it seemed his chances were low as they were already off south towards the enemy camp.

"Previa!" Okin shouted with his whole body just as the white-armored soldier had finally hilted his sword to join the rest of his army.

Previa stopped just as he was about to whip the reins of his horse. He turned around just as Okin ran up to his saddle-side.

"Okin?" Previa stopped and pulled up his visor. His face was mired with genuine concern and shock. "Get back in the bunker!"

"You have to stop them, Previa!"

Okin looked like a child next to the mounted Previa. Though Okin was almost a decade older than Previa, Previa stared down at him like a concerned adult to a lost child.

"Even if I wanted to, it's too late. They would fight on even if the Mouth of the Gods showed up to stop them," Previa sighed. "But you do not want to be here when the enemies' riders and Portalers chase us to try to get their prisoners back."

"Previa--"

"Go inside, Okin. I'll see you later."

Okin stared at Previa. Part of him wanted to jump on the back of Previa's horse, or run back in and grab some gear. But then he looked down at what he was wearing, and his shivering body, and by the time he looked up again, Previa had already turned back to his charging army, and made off.

"Unacceptable!"

The mustached man's meaty hands slammed down on the stone table.

"But Krusadar, what I'm saying is right! We got Islovol's squad back, all alive! The mission was a success--"

"Did your mother make you out of dirt? That's the not the point! You disobeyed orders!"

"To save lives--"

"Do not speak over me, Devinar Previa!" The Krusadar rose to his feet. "You saved no lives. The Farsunni thought your attack was just the start of a proper raid, and sent out an entire company after you killed the original pursuit. To ensure that the entire front wasn't destroyed, the neighboring forts had to send out nearly half their men. We're now waiting on reinforcements as far back as Klivor, and there will be much more casualties than anticipated," the Krusadar's thick eyebrows stared down harshly at Previa, who looked down in embarrassment. "You might've saved a handful of men, but you've doomed thousands."

Previas hands clasped the bottom of the wooden chair, and he rocked back in forth in it, his eyes glancing around to the drawn maps of the region on the walls, desperately avoiding the Krusadar's harsh, continuous stare.

"Now you, Athar," he turned to Okin. "I put you in charge of the men, despite your lack of military experience, as I wanted someone higher than a Devinar to be my substitute. I saw how the men respected your character. I hate to be wrong, but I was, wasn't I?"

Okin looked down. "You are right. I tried to bring order, but it was my lack of character that got in the way."

"Honest as ever, even when it hurts you," the Krusadar paused, his large hands clasped just under his wide chin. "But I cannot respect your lack of authority when I put you in charge."

"You are both hereby dismissed as acting service members of the Versalist military. Athar Okin, as we are equals, and as I assigned you to a post of which you would not normally be expected, you are merely released to go back to your regular town cycle or to return to The Citadel for reassignment. Devinar Previa, as you were the instigator of this unauthorized assault, as your commanding officer I am issuing a discharge and a description of this incident will be added to your permanent record. Any questions?"

Previas head hung low. Okin just shook his head.

"Good. Now get out of my sight."

Okin stared out over the horizon which stretched across over the sandy mountains, where a light breeze created a pleasant translucent curtain of sand, the red sun comfortably veiled by both the curtain and its seat between two mountains. He appreciated the natural beauty of all lands he came across, and always thought to how each of the Four contributed. All gave an equally necessary contribution, but some he had an easier time than others understanding. Intillia brought both the earth, and the waters, and the gasses and winds in the sky; Aredal brought the Light for all living things to see by, through which this view would otherwise be impossible, and by it the heat which allows all living things to survive, and according to some of the newer Istars apparently, also the

sustenance for plants; Olitheon, he could somewhat understand, brought the actual area where all things are, even the stars, but not the actual objects itself, those were still Intillia and Aredal. Him and Nexon brought many other things that were quite confusing. Okin tried to comprehend it abstractly on his own. He had even asked Istars in the natural sciences he met, though it made him uncomfortable, but still, he could not really comprehend it. Still, he trusted it and felt it in his prayers, which was what was most important.

"I'm sorry Okin."

Previa interrupted Okin's tranquil observation, and brought him immediately back to his current air of disdain. Okin turned around and continued heading forward with Previa up the hill.

"That's Athar Okin to you."

Previa raised his hands, "Oh come on, Okin, we've known each other since we were kids--"

"That's Athar Okin to you," Okin's voice sunk like a swamp.

"Okay, okay, ATHAR Okin," Previa said. "So, uh, now that this all over, what's next for ATHAR Okin?"

Previa looked to Okin with the open eyes of a puppy. Okin ignored him.

"Come on, I know you have some plan in that big, meticulous brain of yours."

Okin's glare snapped onto Previa.

"This isn't nothing, Previa. I came here for a reason. To force myself to really JUMP into Bravery."

"You didn't come here to help the Citadel spread the holiness of the Four against the Corruption of the Farsunni heretics?"

Okin glared at Previa. Previa gave a sheepish smile, before sighing.

"This was important to me, too. This was a chance for me to grow in Bravery, and Temperance, too. I know how you feel."

Okin's glare softened. He waited for Previa to hoist himself upwards into the cart. Previa offered Okin a hand, but by then Okin was already himself getting into the cart, and he didn't take it. The driver whipped the reins and the cart made off.

Previa collapsed against the side of the cart, and rested his cheek on his arm which he rested on the side of the cart. The cart bumped up and down against the cobbly road, and the young Devinar just let his face slide into his hand like melting wood.

"Well, if you have to know, I'm going to the Citadel. Probably to see Impalias Aldwin."

Previa sighed again. He stretched his arms and readjusted so his arms provided a cushion for his back against the cart.

"Yeah, I think I'm gonna have to go see dad too."

Okin stared away from Previa, outside the cart. His eyes drifted, not on any of the dry yellow countryside, but past it. His mind was on what the future could hold, but it was just soft, meaningless impressions.

He raised the back of his hand into his gaze. The singular golden stroke shone in the Light. *Truth.* He stretched his other index finger against it. He drew out an invisible stroke, coming out from the other golden stroke. *Bravery*, he said to himself.

He drew the stroke again, keeping his finger on it even as the cart jumped upwards and his whole body shook.

Bravery.