Oops I Wrote a Thing

Isabella looked around her, confused at first of where she was. That confusion quickly turned to icy realization as she took in the all-too familiar setting of her old home. She hesitated before clenching her fists, taking the short steps into the large home. There were minor changes, as she would have expected. Fashion changes over a century. Tastes change with new owners.

And yet, even with the changes, she knew it was still the Marx family manor. The familiar family portraits staring down at her as she made her way up the grand staircase, some newer that she didn’t recognize, other’s older that she did. She paused at the top of the staircase when she reached her parent’s portrait, running her fingers along the frame gingerly before moving to the next painting.

She gave a short bitter laugh; so her brother had married that pretty petite blonde after all. Good for him. It was what he had wanted anyway. Her fingertips lingered softly over her brother’s older features, those kind blue eyes seemed to stare at her, even through the painting.

Her lips tightened into a firm line and she turned sharply to the right, making the familiar steps down the hall to the end. She turned down another corner before her steps slowed to a stop, her fists loosening in their grip before clenching again. The door to her room was gone.

Or so it seemed.

When she stepped closer she could see a barely visible crease in the shape of a door, imprinted in the wallpaper. Isabella took out one of her knives and started carving through the thin paper, creating a tattered seam, ripping away the paper in strips where she knew the door handle should go.

She looked around and spotted the vanity in the hallway, opening and closing it’s drawers until she found what she wanted; a single door knob and a skeleton key. If that didn’t work then she’d bust down the door completely with her scythe if she must.

With a few twists and a click of the lock, the door creaked open noisily, the sound echoing through the empty house. Her breath hitched as she stepped inside. Everything was left exactly the way she had left it, albeit neatly blanketed in a layer of dust. Undisturbed by time.

A flash of gold caught her peripheral vision and she turned quickly, dagger at the ready until her knees went weak; hanging neatly on the wall was a painting she and Fairfox had posed for before he kidnapped her. In the painting she looked fresh and happy, like a young girl in love, and Fairfox the stoic gentleman as ever. His smile gentle instead of sinister. Instead of that cocky smirk forever branded in her memory.

That’s when she noticed the roots. There were plant roots, snaking their way over the wall and floor and up the ceiling, leading to her old closets. She gripped her dagger tightly before cautiously moving to the closet door, tugging her face mask up over her nose in case something poisonous sprouted at her.

As quickly as she could she yanked the doors open and jumped back only to stumble on her footing and drop her dagger, her fingers going numb as she beheld a wild bush full of blooming blue roses over running her old closet, thriving off the light shining through the small window in the back.

A sudden flare of anger ripped through her chest as she grit her teeth, snatching the painting off of the wall and raising it, every intention of destroying the roses and busting the painting to pieces. However, something caught her vision as the light hit the painting, casting an odd shadow from the back.

She stopped and turned the painting, ripping open the back to find a slim silver key, shaped like a rose. The flower itself was set with blue goldstone that glittered under the dictation of the light. She ran her fingers over the beautiful metal, turning it over to find Fairfox’s seal engraved on the back.

Isabella tensed as her grip tightened over the key, the points in the metal indenting through her gloves painfully: What was this? Another damn clue? Another hoop to jump through before she truly got what she wanted?

She closed her eyes and shook her head, her hands trembling slightly before she raised her hand, ready to throw the key at the bush. She froze however, when she realized she was no longer in her closet.

She looked around frantically again, spinning on her heel to get a good look, a pang slicing through her chest as she took in the small cottage she use to live in with Rowan so long ago. It looked the same way it had before she left; gloomy, cold and empty without Rowan’s warm smile. Perpetually in mourning.

She looked down at the key in her hand in confusion before her head snapped up towards the door, sudden terror gripping her like a cold vice. She dashed towards the door, bursting through it and staggering slightly as she sprinted down the road, making the all too painfully familiar trip she knew by heart. Skidding to a stop only when she was at the cemetery’s Iron Gate.

Her breaths came heavy as sweat dripping down her neck, her chest burning as she made a beeline towards Rowan’s grave. The soil looked fresh and upturned despite it being little over a century. She could hear thunder clouds in the distance but she didn’t care, she shoved the odd key into her pocket and searched frantically for a shovel, starting the grueling task of digging up Rowan’s grave, each jab into the ground like a stab in her chest as she fought off tears of panic.

Her heart nearly stopped at that tell-tale *clang*as the shovel hit its intended treasure. She threw the shovel to the side and started using her hands, clearing away the moist soil before she went rigid, her breath freezing in her lungs. This wasn’t the coffin they had buried Rowan in. They had buried him in a plain wooden coffin, but what she had just dug up was a sleek and smooth silver, the same silver as the key...

She cleared away more of the dirt, a sob threatening to rip through her throat, Fairfox’s seal burning through her vision right beneath Rowan’s name. A bit lower was a key hole, decorated with a thorn patterned engraving.

Without hesitating, she drew the key from her pocket and slid it into the lock, her heart squeezing at the perfect fit before she turned it, an audible *clank*resonating through the coffin.

Isabella scrambled to the side and threw the coffin lid open only to cry out and fall forward, the tears she had been holding back now streaming down her face as she shook her head in disbelief: the coffin was empty.

Isabella jerked awake, her hand instantly going to the dagger at her side as she pointed it straight at a surprised Yorick who shook his head, holding his hands up defensively. She was panting, sweat beading at her forehead, her muscles tense and ready to spring, “Woah there, you okay? You look ready to kill.”

Isabella froze and dropped her defensive stance, sitting up and sheathing her dagger, her tone cold and bland, “Nightmare.”

Yorick gave a nervous laugh, “Yeah, I guess Hell will do that to you. Hopefully this next assignment will take your mind off that.”

Isabella frowned and straightened, muttering under her breath as Yorick turned his attention back to the rest of the party, “I doubt that...”

They were currently on the road to Nenril, circumstances having happened to lead to a new assignment in the great Elven capital. Isabella had been restless for weeks now during their journey. They would be hitting the city gates soon and it left a nasty taste in her mouth. Security would be even tighter now with the almost-war between Tirion and Erresea, it would be bad if one of the Elven guards happened to recognize her from so many years ago. Blue hair wasn’t such a common trait after all.

**>>Skipping forward assuming they get in passed security somehow as per mission agenda**

Isabella made it a point to avoid certain areas of the city and didn’t talk much while they were there, even when they weren’t off doing errands for their assignment and relaxing at the inn they were staying at. For the most part, Isabella kept her hood and mask up as well, ignoring the whispers and strange looks she got. She countlessly told herself it was for the better, in case someone recognized her while with her guild, no matter how many times Yorick might complain about her appearance being ‘unfriendly.’

It had been about a week into their stay that she finally mustered up the courage to go out on her own, giving a vague answer of ‘shopping’ when questioned by her guildmates. Her palms began to sweat in her gloves as she made her way down the familiar streets, her pulse spiking with adrenaline.

She took off her hood and mask when she stepped in front of the bakery shop, her eyes pained and her chest tight, making it hard to breath. She took a deep steadying breath before opening the door, the same chime ringing out with the action as it did so long ago. As if nothing had happened.

She was aware of the hush that fell over the chattering customers and the stares she was receiving, some concerned, others shocked before they turned pitying. The strong cheery voice of Rowan’s father, Bastiff Fenrir, boomed out from behind the counter, oblivious to the changed atmosphere as he came in, grin on his face and wiping his hands of flower with a rag, “*How can I help*—”

His cheerful smile froze and dropped as soon as he saw Isabella, his eyes wide with shock, mouth opening and closing soundlessly as words evaded him. Though the man didn’t resemble much of his son, they at least shared their grey eyes and mannerisms. Rowan had taken after his mother otherwise.

For the first time in a long while, Isabella gave the Elf a sad smile, her voice tight with held back emotion, “*I was in the city and thought I’d pay my respects. I’m sorry I waited so long...*”

She stepped towards the counter and felt a sharp pain when Bastiff took a step back, stammering slightly as he avoided her gaze, “*Isabella... It’s been so long... What brings you to the city?*"

She stopped a few steps away from the counter, letting that cold numbness slowly shield her heart, clearing her throat slightly before she answered, “*I joined a guild... I’m here on an assignment... I went out alone today and thought I might visit after so long... I know I left so suddenly and I’m sorry... I didn’t handle things very well...*”

He seemed to calm down in his shock and fidgeted slightly, “*We all had it hard dear, no one can blame you.*”

He suddenly brightened, still avoiding her eyes, “*You must be busy with guild work, why don’t I send you on your way with a nice lemon seed cake, on the house. For old times sake.*”

Isabella’s throat tightened and she gave a weary smile, “*No, I couldn’t—*”

He waved her off, fluttering about nervously, “*Oh but I insist! I’ll wrap one up for you now! I made some fresh this morning!*”

Isabella frowned slightly, she knew she was gone long but had Rowan’s death really changed him so much? She raised a hand, stepping forward, “*Really, I—*”

She was suddenly cut off by the bell chiming behind her, a cheery voice that stopped Isabella’s heart completely covering her own, “*Pa! Mrs. Benwick down the street is requesting a large order of specialty cakes~!*”

Isabella’s eyes widened as she watched Bastiff’s complexion pale, whirling around and stumbling back a step as her back hit the counter, her eyes drinking in a perfectly healthy and living Rowan.

Isabella swallowed hard, her body trembling as her lungs seem to fail her, the air leaving her body to let her burn from the inside out, tears brimming in her eyes as the air thickened with tension. Her voice came out strangled with disbelief as she tried desperately to reel in her emotions, “*Rowan*?”

This was obviously some trick. Some illusion. Perhaps she was dreaming again. She would never actually muster the courage to come to the bakery and visit Bastiff. It wasn’t true.

Rowan looked at her in shock, taken aback as he looked towards his dad with poorly hidden discomfort, “*Yes? Do we know each other?*”

That was the final blow that ripped open the gaping hole in her heart. She snapped her head to the side to look at Bastiff, hoping for some answers, something rational and tangible. All she found was fear and guilt. This wasn’t a dream. It was a living nightmare.

Her knees buckled suddenly under her weight, her body feeling suddenly weak as she gripped the counter tightly, her chest burning and eye brimming with unshed tears, her head gripping at her chest as she tried to breath properly, her tears spilling as she heard Rowan’s concerned voice, “*Are you okay, Miss?*”

It was like a dagger was being driven into her chest as her memory tortured her with that voice, *‘Bella, what’s wrong?’*No, it was as if she were a stranger.

Bastiff frantically took of his apron and came to her side, waving off his son, “*Its fine Rowan, I’ll bring her upstairs and take care of her. She’s an old friend of mine. You watch the shop.*”

Her hand gripped Bastiff’s arm tightly as he helped her up, her voice sharp and quiet so Rowan wouldn’t hear, “We need to talk. Now.”

Bastiff hesitated but nodded, leading her up the stairs to their over-shop home, Isabella ripping her arm out of his grasp as soon as they were alone, her voice coming out in a hiss, “I want answers and I want them now.”

He looked at her startled before his expression turned guilty again, her voice coming out softer as she dropped into a chair and hung her head, “*Is that really Rowan?*”

There was a moment of hesitation, the silence nearly choking her before he answered, confirming what she already knew, “*Yes. It is...*”

She took in a ragged breath, “*How*.”

Bastiff took a seat himself and rubbed a hand over his face, “*I don’t know. About a month after you left, he showed up on our doorstep, alive and unconscious. At first we thought it was a cruel joke, or perhaps a miracle. When we woke up we asked him what he remembered...*”

A lump tightened her throat, “*And?*”

There was another hesitating pause, Bastiff obviously reluctant to tell her what she already suspected, to confirm her fears, “*He doesn’t remember you... His memory stops right before you came...*”

A sob raked through Isabella, her voice strangled, “*He was alive this whole time?! And I didn’t know?!*” Her fists clenched as her vision blurred with tears, her shoulders shaking as she sobbed, “*You knew and you didn’t tell me?! What would you have done had I run into him on the street?!*”

Bastiff flinched and looked down at his hands, “*I don’t know... You left so suddenly, none of us knew where you went or if you were alive... And he’s living a normal life now... He’s happy...*”

Everything inside of Isabella seemed to shatter, her world unraveling at the seams; could she really blame him for not telling her? After all, if it weren’t for her, Rowan would have lived a long healthy life. He never would have died to begin with.

She reached inside her cloak and pulled out the chain that hung around her neck, Rowan’s wedding band dangling at the end, “*I’ve loved him all this time... I’ve cherished every memory... There hasn’t been a moment that I didn’t miss him, that I didn’t regret ruining his life...*”

She finally looked up, Bastiff staring at her with tears in his grey eyes, the eyes that resembled his son’s so much. He stood and walked into another room where she could hear him opening a drawer. He came back with a small leather pouch and handed it to her quietly.

She took it and hesitantly opened it before dumping the contents onto her palm, her breath catching as her wedding band fell from the pouch. She looked up at Bastiff, her eyes asking the question she couldn’t voice.

“*It was in his pocket when he came back. I found it before he woke up.*”

Isabella’s lip trembled as she shoved the ring back into the pouch and tossed it back to Bastiff, “*His ring is the only thing I have left of him. He should at least have the same. Even if he doesn’t remember.*”

They stared at each other for a moment, sharing in one another’s pain, though Isabella felt a small resentment, knowing that at the end of the day, they may have lost Rowan once together, but now Isabella lost him a second time by herself. And that hurt all the more.

She wiped away her tears and took a deep breath, “*I should go. You wouldn’t want your son asking too many questions.*” She gave a half-hearted smile that didn’t reach her eyes.

Bastiff looked at her in amazement before nodding and wiping his own eyes, “*Right. I’ll walk you out.*”

There weren’t as many customers downstairs as there was before but she supposed she should be grateful for that. Rowan was fidgeting behind the counter, stealing glances at the stairwell, obviously worried and curious. Isabella couldn’t help the small smile that came to her lips despite the pang she felt in her chest.

Rowan glanced frantically between Isabella and Bastiff, itching to ask questions but smiling politely anyway, “*Is everything okay? You gave me quite the scare earlier.*”

Despite how she tried, she couldn’t choke out a laugh but she gave a small smile, “*Yes, everything is fine. Your father is a good man and a good friend.*”

Rowan laughed, “*I can only hope to be like him someday.*” He switched to English, “*I was surprised that you knew my father, it’s not often you see humans around here. Usually they aren’t allowed in the city.*”

Isabella’s heart squeezed, her memory flashing back to the very first day she met Rowan. She held back her tears, and gave a weak smile, “I’m not exactly human.” *But I’ve told you that before...*

The brunette only tilted his head in momentary confusion before carrying on the conversation easily with his usual friendly smile, “*Regardless, it’s nice to see a new face around here. I’m Rowan, by the way, but I suppose you already knew that.*”

Isabella’s lips tightened and she nodded before turning to Bastiff who was fighting the sad expression from his face, “*Parchment*.”

He was startled for a moment but nodded and went behind the counter, taking out a slip of parchment and some writing charcoal. Isabella took it and wrote quickly, “*If you ever need to contact me, my guild’s tavern is here. Don’t be afraid to write.*” She caught his eye, knowing he would understand her unspoken meaning.

He glanced down at the paper and gave a weak smile, “*So you decided to settle back home, did you?*”

Isabella’s eyes slid over to Rowan, who was still smiling cheerfully, before she gave Bastiff a sad smile, “*You know this will always be my home.*”

His smile faltered and he nodded, waving her out as she left.

Her second stop was the cemetery.

Rowan’s headstone was gone, the lot empty, the place he had been buried now overgrown with grass and wildflowers. She stood silent for a moment before she fell to her knees and broke down in sobs, her fingers gripping at the grass and yanking it out of the ground before she yelled a battle cry out at the sky.

She punched the ground and yelled out as she cried, “You bastard! I know you can hear me! I don’t care anymore, I’ll do whatever you want! Just let him remember me! Just...” Her voice broke as she bowed her head, her body trembling uncontrollably as she spoke quieter, “At least let him remember me...”

By the time she went back to the tavern it was dark, her mask was pulled up and her hood was drawn down over her face. She didn’t say a single word as she made her way up to her rented room, locking the door behind her despite Yorick’s pestering. She didn’t eat. She didn’t speak. She didn’t sleep.

She closed her eyes.