

Greetings and allow me to humbly thank you for deciding to read a small sample of my work-in-progress Fantasy Epic,

"Defier" (this is still the working title for the series right now)

I sincerely hope you enjoy this short read and find my work as the greatest piece of fantasy media you have ever witnessed, if not that's fine too :)

I must also thank everyone who has helped in the launching of this sample, most notably my brothers, of course "Zorro" himself and The ZEN Olympiad.

Once again... Thank you!

-Dawn Koshy

(for any inquires on the novel series and please do leave your reviews at:

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*Bloodied soldier raises his fist to the sky
But from the obsidian desert will his plea cry
Carrying the body of family until his strength wanes
While the metallic birds of prey make short his people's
pains*

*Your time of delivery comes close o Khrovann
Your father prepares the crop for the great Empress
Fatten like calves o men and women of the harvest
Make way for the all-powerful Temptress*

*Renavar child of blood
Soon he shall be like me
Whilst She prepares the blood's great fall
Keep fast to the knowledge that the Unseen Eye sees all*

-The Unseen Eye

CHAPTER 1: SONS OF BLOOD

As he peered into the ravine, he saw no shadows as the noon sun hovered above him. His eyes glazed over the rocky outcrop of the walls of the ravine, looking for patterns that did not belong. Rocks. . . sharp jagged rocks. . . “too sharp” he thought to himself and too evenly spaced.

He grabbed his spear from his side which was laying on the grass much like him in his current situation. The spear was crafted of blacksteel and was lined intricately with *kri* crystal which ran throughout the spear’s blade and along the length of the weapon meeting at the middle where it branched outwards in the core and rim of the ovular shield which was conjoined with the spear. An elegant weapon too heavy for common warriors and royal guards to wield in battle efficiently.

But the *Krivann* were no common war fodder.

He looked once more across the ravine walls to reassure what he had seen. It was still there, the subtle pattern which he had been taught to recognise so well. An *Evanant*. . . the same one he had been tracking for five days while on his journey south. In the distance he heard the neighing of multiple horses. As he looked down the ravine and followed the road that travelled between it north, he saw an open top carriage drawn by two horses and the man at their reigns.

“Damn” , he whispered as he hastily got up on his legs and started waving frantically to get his attention. No luck. He was too high up and out of his periphery.

This road was commonly travelled as it led to the capitol of the Caedmon kingdom, Eestol. . . his home. The carriage drew closer and entered the ravine. The rather small man looked up at the towering rocky walls of the ravine, admiring their stature and almost unnatural beauty. The carriage bed was full, but it wasn’t clear what he was carrying as a large linen had been laid over it.

An awkward growl resonated within the ravine followed by a drizzle of small rocks. The carriage driver looked up in fear as he fully expected to be crushed by a well-timed rockfall. . . but his fate was to be much crueller. The horses jumped up but did not run forward as the falling stones deterred them. Their neighing, loud and filled with fear.

The wall was moving, revealing itself from its camouflage. Its tail moving rapidly side-to-side freeing itself from the ravine wall which it had dug

itself into for anchorage. Its wings unfurled themselves, revealing their size to be two times larger than the man's carriage. Its claws let go of the wall, leaping down in front of him. One horse came loose of its harness and ran forward as it was its only choice of direction.

One bite. . .the horse's cries were no more. The man screamed something horrible, but dragons sadly do not understand the *old tongue* let alone the new one. The Evanant crept closer once it had swallowed the man's companion, its fore limbs were wings conjoined to three massive claws. Its tail was thick and robust with bladed scales on the flank of the tail to aid with sawing into rock walls such as that of the ravine. Its head was sleek as its horns followed the contour of its skull. It barely fit in the ravine but seemed to have made it a hunting ground due to its popularity amongst its prey items. As the Evanant opened its mouth while it slithered closer, the man looked to see its sickle-shaped teeth alongside its tongue which had the shape of an oddly disfigured arrowhead. The carriage driver covered his face, praying in his heart to *Khro* for a saviour worthy of defeating such a "vile beast".

The sound of a deep bellow followed by a devilish hiss and the sound of ringing metal. As the carriage driver moved his arms, he saw the man strugglingly getting back up on his feet. In his right hand he held a blacksteel spear with blood crystals intertwined within the metal spear, and with his left he removed his grass-stained cloak and dropped it to the floor.

His shoulders were adorned by more blacksteel but now in the shape of bottom jaws of which the carriage driver had no knowledge from which animal or "vile beast" it hailed from. His spine was sparsely plaited with more blacksteel which wrapped around his ribcage creating a false metal one. The spine had one jointed piece of black steel and cloth wrapped around it. His legs, besides the black clothing, remained largely unprotected for the exception of his knees and feet which adorned more blacksteel but had dense cloth at the joints as well as to not hinder his range of movement. The carriage driver's eyes raised up from the man's legs to his arms. Cloth and blacksteel plates on his elbows but no clothing was present on his forearms. Red tattoos moved under his skin and mimicked the movement of his arteries. They finally glowed bright crimson as the man's vascular tissue bulged under his light brown skin.

His left hand reached behind him as the cramped Draconid tried to regain its senses. His hand stopped right next to his lower spine where a cannister resided attached to the lowest part of his spinal armour. He spread his palm and fingers as the red tattoos reached into his palm and pulsed a dim red flash. Crimson powder, the colour of fresh blood, shot

out of the cannister's many holes onto the man's hand and stuck to his palm creating a pattern resembling that of the dragon's tongue.

Simultaneously the dragon raised its head, and two large sacks popped out from its neck, then slowly returned to its normal state with its neck pustules back in position.

The Draconid lowered its head, and the man hastily turned his and shouted out to the carriage driver, "Move back! Tell your damned horse to move back!"

"She doesn't want to listen!" the carriage driver replied just as loudly.

The Draconid charged and the carriage driver heard the faint sound of the man cursing. It bit down but the man lodged his now circular shield which he had extended by pulling its handle to the side into the dragon's mouth. He pulled back with all his strength and weight as his obsidian coloured hair flowed back while he faced up towards the sky. The Draconid whipped its head to the side hitting the ravine wall and dislodging the man simultaneously. As he tried to get back to his feet, the Evanant charged without a second thought, its mouth wide open and its tongue pulsing red. The movement of air clearly switched directions towards the man's left hand. He moved the blacksteel shield and spear revealing his palm which glowed red from the crimson dust while facing it towards the charging Draconid. The Evanant cried out as its head shot backwards along with its body as the faintly red kinetic pulse shot from the man's palm.

The walls shook as the pulse roared in front of the man's palm throughout the ravine.

"Above you!"

As the spearman looked up, he saw a boulder hurdling towards him. . . too big he thought. Too big and too late. It was not in fact too late. . . a black flash hit the oncoming boulder shattering it into manageable rubble. Without any further thought the man brought up his spear and kneeled down while covering his head with the conjoined shield.

Slowly lowering his spear which stood two meters in length, he stood up looking towards the topless carriage.

The carriage driver simultaneously looked in awe at the man in the carriage as the man stood on his knee in the carriage bed. His armour the mirror of the man who bested the Draconid, save for his shoulder guards as they seemed to belong to another viler beast, only his weapon and hair differed. A large bow remained in his hand. It was thick and also made of

blacksteel with blood crystals intertwined within the steel. His hair so short that his slightly darker skin could be seen. In a flash as the man in the carriage raised his hand revealing the pulsating red tattoos on his palm, the arrow, made almost entirely of the crimson *Kri* crystals, which he had fired, dislodged from the rocky wall and returned to his hand allowing him to set it back in his quiver.

His face revealed a smile while looking at the man with the spear, "Renavar Korsvann, in dire need of my help, as always." He chuckled while holding out his arms.

The man with the spear holstered it on his back semi-diagonally and while also holding out his arms carving a rather gentle smile on his face spoke out, "Kanaan Serrovann, dead asleep while other lives are at stake, as always."

Kanaan placed the bow down and jumped from the carriage to meet Renavar in an embrace, "Three cycles, is it? Damn it's been too long, brother." Kanaan said while holding Renavar's head.

"Indeed" he smiled, "it's been too long", the spearman said while holding him tight.

The carriage driver got down as well to show his respect, "It is an honour to not only to be in the presence of two Krivann marauders but who are brothers at that!" he said with a smile and in a clearly foreign accent, as he took off his hat.

"Well, we are technically cousins but might as well be," Kanaan added while letting go of Renavar. "I must say Ren, taking on a Evanant all by your lonesome. . . it seems the North hasn't taught you much in terms of wisdom. Are you out of *Kri*?"

"No, and even if I was, Serro taught us not to harvest any from Evanants. And why would I, this close to the city walls?" he pulled out a knife with a vial imbedded in the blade's core.

"But you intend to harvest its blood?"

"They use it in the North as a . . . remedy."

"I see," he placed his hand on Renavar's shoulder, "Well go get that blood before he wakes up."

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They sat between stained barrels rather uncomfortably as Renavar consistently squirmed in vain effort to find a comfortable position. The rich scent of aged vintage perfumed the air around the dark oak barrels which were rather too little to be for a regular shipment. The road was smooth due to its high number of travellers it saw everyday yet there were still holes and bumps strewn about. Renavar looked out into the grasslands met by small, wooded areas too insignificant to be called forests. In the distance towards the North, he saw the hill on which he had camped a few nights prior while tracking the Evanant. He fiddled with the knife between his hands carefully as he knew that getting another sample would be difficult since the Evanant had most probably awakened by then.

"Three cycles, am I correct master Renavar?" asked the carriage driver who Renavar now knew was called Bolit.

"Yes, three summers."

"Master Kanaan mentioned you while on the road just before we were attacked by some *bluudy* bandits." Bolit said while turning around to face them, "I am more than thankful that he was there, they would've killed me otherwise."

"I am guessing that fight is what put you to sleep."

"That and the lack of some famous wine," Kanaan said with a grimace, "all these barrels yet father denied me the permission to have some!"

"That's because Serro knows how you are drunk. . . remember our first feast at Baron Vilavert?" Renavar pointed out the castle in the distance behind Kanaan.

"How could I forget?" he grimaced "Ah those days. . . the skirmish, the feast and of course you and Ingrid's first meeting!" he laughed but Renavar clearly implemented a fake smile which Kanaan could recognise anywhere.

Renavar looked towards Bolit the Carriage driver attempting to change the subject, "Soo, carrying wine?" he tapped the barrels to hear their contents, hearing a dense thud.

"Indeed. In fact, they are the best grapes you'll taste in *Caedmun*!"

"Are they from Caedmon? Or Soprok?"

“*Suprok?*” his eyes grew nervous, “Ah. . . why would you say that master?”

“The accent isn’t subtle at all.” Kanaan answered instead, “it’s clear you’re from Soprok and with that probably your grape seeds too.”

Bolit looked bested by the two while giving a submissive sigh, “Originally. . . but now my harvest is on Caedmon land!” he said with false pride.

“Hmm, a shame we can’t taste any.” Renavar swept the loose hair off his forehead. “this wine. . . must be for an important event.”

The city of Eestol with its stone walls and castle could finally be seen. The castle was situated in the centre of the city and had multiple towers surrounding it. The city itself was built in the meander of the Valant river which was man-made by diverging the greater river upstream in order to make the semi-moat around the city, an extra layer of protection from wars past. Behind the city the vast ocean of black sand could be seen. The desert wrapped around the entire realm surrounding the land on which all the *Khrovann* kingdoms lay indicating that Eestol was the southernmost point in the realm. Beside the city, the tall but slim Mount *Vulker* could be seen towering above the walls, where both the Sons of Blood had sat at its summit to see the endless ocean of black sand cycles past.

“Queen Cincia has left us,” Kanaan looked towards the city gates, “happened a few days ago.”

Renavar looked emotionless yet Kanaan knew there was sorrow behind his empty eyes. Helena, Renavar’s mother, was the Queens chambermaid consequently Renavar had spent days with ‘Auntie Cincia’ on multiple occasions when she came to visit their home without the King’s knowledge of her doing so. He knew that Renavar felt his words in the deepest chasm in his bloodied heart.

“. . .What happened?”

“Killed by the Barbarians when she was taking her usual journey to the Blackfalls.”

“Barbarians? Were you not there?”

“No. Father assigned me to Vilavert’s keep for a while once you left.”

“Damn it!” Renavar hissed quietly as he looked down at his knife once more.

Renavar looked into cousin's eyes. Just as he expected, no lies.

"...damn it."

As they arrived at the city Gates, Bolit showed the guardsmen the letter from the King with his seal on the bottom. Inside the city walls, Renavar looked at burnt ruins of towering frames and Kanaan curiously followed his gaze.

"Hmm they burnt it down?"

"All three of them."

"Three? There was but one Academy when I left."

"Two more took its place after the first was ravaged by supposed 'barbarian apologists' or so the Royals say."

"Is learning that bad, wanting to educate other's? Like us at *Krivannest*?"

"The barbarians could give fuck all about our needs."

"You think the *Khrovann* any better? They sleep with the common folk to spread their 'holy blood'. . . keeping their subjects undereducated is their best move if they want more control."

"Then why have us, the few that *are* educated to use blood magic?"

"... I do not know"

As the carriage was pulled through the busy streets with their afternoon trader commotion, Bolit gained a smile as turned his miniature head around,

"Say, masters, since you saved my life and my carriage, I believe tonight's festivities should be your reward *tuu*. I am sure the King would not mind your being there."

They both looked at one another with intrigue in their eyes.

"Well, we could drink together in her name one last time." Renavar said with a smile baring teeth.

"So, I can count on you being there, Ren?" Kanaan prepared to jump off the carriage, "It would be fun to see you all dressed up again."

Renavar nodded, "I have to pick up some new garments. . . something black preferably."

"Oooh?" He tilted his head in curiosity, "So that's what the North has done to you! Change your taste in clothing? Hope they didn't alter your taste for women while they were at it"

"I assure you," he said with a smile " they haven't in the slightest."

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As the door opened, he was met by the curious glance of his mother then followed by a delayed smile. She ran forward and embraced him.

"Is this really you?"

"No, I'm just a *Krivann* that looks exactly like your son.", he said with a grimace.

She looked at the scars on his arms and the large scar on his jugular, "I may believe you sadly" she raised her head, " have you not been careful with yourself?"

She was exactly as he remembered. Her matte black hair which he didn't inherit was neatly tied into a bun, exposing her round scar on the right side of her temples which he normally hid behind her hair. In fact Renavar hadn't received anything from his mother in terms of appearance although Cincia always complemented him for having his mother's "crafty planning".

" 'A bonus of the trade' as Serro says." he smiled at her then glanced around the room after putting his spear down, "Is father not here?"

"No, he has gone on a hunt outside the walls in preparation for the harvest."

"Harvest is days off, isn't it too late to go hunting now?"

"He insisted. . ." She let go of him and gestured towards a chair, "sit, I wish to hear of your journey."

"First," he glanced to the door on the side of the room, "let me greet *her*."

As he walked toward the door, he stopped before opening it and looked back at his mother, "How is her health?"

She looked down as if she hesitated to answer his question, yet she still did,

"Worse. . ."

A long pause followed her words as a sigh left Renavar's nose.

". . . Her eyes have grown clouded and she loses blood rapidly. So much so that your father and I struggle to give her that much safely."

"I'm sorry."

"No, you must not be. I trust you found your solution. Now go, see your sister."

As he opened the door he smelled the stench of dried blood. On a bed by the window, she lay. Small, young and fragile. He walked toward her to see her. Pale. . . her eyes were indeed hazed, her sapphire irises no longer visible.

He pulled the white cloth which covered her body off. The bed sheet had been stained by blood which had evacuated her body. Her mouth also harboured stains from a recent bleeding. He carried her to another bed and changed the sheets to new ones he found in the room. He then set her back down on the bed and kneeled down beside her while caressing her hair. Irresponsive.

"I'm sorry I left you for so long, Rein." He took out the knife and laid it on the table beside her, "but I believe I have it."

He brought a small mixing dish closer and pressed the blade against it to release a little amount of the Evanant blood, "They said this would work, that it was tried and tested. . . I trust them." he looked at her and placed his hand on her bare chest. The only reason he knew that she lived was the faint feeling of her heart beating. He pulled out a piece of paper and set it on the table. It displayed the silhouette of a human with an intricate pattern drawn over it.

He brought his hand over the dish and sliced his fingertip with the knife as to let some blood flow into the dish. He grabbed the dish and dipped his fingers in it.

"Blood of my blood. . ." he ran his fingers over her body while looking at the paper for reference while replicating the pattern the elders had shown

him. Her skin was pale white, her breasts were flat, and her ribcage was protruding out of her skin as if trying to escape the prison of her comatose body. Her hip bones stuck outwards, and her skin was tightly wrapped around her small body.

“ You should be thirteen cycles old now. . . a young woman and yet. . . you look the same as the day I left.” His eyes glistened and a tear hit the floor next to the bed, “I shall tell you of my travels tonight. I’ll have cycles worth of stories for you.” He said with a faint smile while wiping the next tear away. As he set the dish on the table, he noticed a golden ring set with agates and silver leaves surrounding the stones.

He picked up the ring and held it close as more tears followed.

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The castle entrance was as beautiful as he remembered from his vivid dreams nights prior: the myriad of exotic plants not all native to Caedmon, the most stunning of which was the golden flowers from the kingdom of Feldrin, the northern most point of the entire realm, was in full bloom this season. The grass remained green as always due to ample watering.

The garden lead up from the road into the main courtyard where the entrance to the throne room resided. The white stairs at the entrance to the throne room, where the wake was to be held, was guarded by Royal Guards who wore full plate armour bearing swords that were sheathed. Renavar pulled up the white sleeves of his shirt which he had on under his black sleeveless tunic. His forearms showed the red tattoos made of blood that were now rested in three bands below his elbows showing his high rank and experience.

“Greetings. . . *Krivann?*” the guard looked at Renavar in confusion. The guard he did not know, but his rather majestic golden hair made him seem important in the spearman’s eyes.

The feast commemorating the Queen’s legacy was to be attended by all the Royal *Khrovann* of Caedmon. Many carriages supporting different emblems where along the main road. He recognised but a few of them of which he had worked with personally during cycles past. But they all had one similarity as they all had the mark of the *Entilath* blade, a split great sword thought to have been used by *Khro* during his three hundred cycle conquest of the pagan lands, hundreds of thousands of cycles past. Eestol

was one of his rumoured homes throughout the realms, but to him these rumours never made much in the way of sense as to why the dragon-rider would find this uninteresting place a suitable home for a god. It was a suitable home nonetheless for him, just not for ancient divine persons. The Royals called themselves the *Khrovann*, the descendants of Khro the saviour of the godless lands. It is for that reason that royal men were deemed to have holy blood and encouraged to breed with as many commonfolk as necessary. Afterwards it would be the responsibility of the men who these common women were already with at the time of the royal “blessing” to look after the blessed heirs. “To purify their Pagan blood”. . . Serro’s words, Royalty himself that decided to remain with his child against all prior tradition of not doing so. Kanaan was lucky.

“Yes, I come to pay my respects to the late Queen.”

“We did not ask for *Krivann* support, the crowns have already brought their own.”

“I do not come here as protection, which is your job not mine. I come as a guest to pay my respects-” Renavar felt a hand on his left shoulder and as he looked across, he saw a man with black hair coupled with white strands strewn about his scalp; his hair was tied in a neat bun, and he was cleanshaven unlike Renavar and Kanaan who was also beside the man. His left hand missing which Renavar knew was torn off while fighting an Evanant. This was also most probably why he taught them never to hunt those Draconids.

“General Sparis, is there a problem with letting my nephew pass?”

His forearms also harboured three rings of *Kri* tattoos, but he was most definitely still their superior,

“Master Serro. . . you honour us with your presence. There is no problem I was simply confused on seeing more Sons of Blood seeing that we never asked-”

“Yet we are here, now if you would kindly let us pass, I will let the king himself know of your limitless loyalty to the kingdom and its security and not mention your prejudice to non-Khrovann like my nephew here.” Serro did not wait for his response but rather patted the general’s shoulder and motioned for them to enter the hall. Renavar looked at Kanaan with a smile as Kanaan shrugged his shoulders almost embarrassingly.

The throne room was laden with white and gold marble columns. Royalty and the Queen’s closest subjects.

“Renavar I am glad you could join us once more.” Serro said with a straight face and a half-assed smile that did not seem too genuine.

Renavar nodded and followed Kanaan to the wine.

“Uncle is the same as ever I see.” he said while chuckling.

“What, you expected him to change?” he looked back at his father, “that’s where you went wrong.”

“Let’s see what’s so special about this wine.” They cheered their glasses and drank the whole cup much to the dismay of a Royal right next to them, ‘boors’ he must have thought.

“I have tasted better piss.” Kanaan’s face puckered slightly, “the hell is that musty flavour?”

“Perhaps Bolit detests royal gatherings as much as us.” He said while laughing.

In the front of the hall were two thrones, one clearly bigger than the other but that did not subtract from Cincia’s allure. Many called her the crown jewel of the Caedmon Kingdom, Renavar included. She did not harbour any detest to commoners like Helena or himself who had no Royal blood. She was an oasis betwixt the obsidian desert of nepotistic sands and dunes crafted by the winds of prejudice.

Two staircases ran on either side of the thrones leading to the royal chambers and the rest of the keep. King Arvan had finally arrived from the inner keep and was now standing in front of his throne. His golden crown in hand but instead of adorning it he hung it on his throne and walked forward. He scanned the room without a single hint of expression in his face or any emotive movements. Royal families of the southern kingdoms were first to want to greet him with attempted embraces and kisses, but he stopped them all before they came in contact with him.

“He’s been like this since a few days after her death. . . people say he has gone mad.” Kanaan looked on curiously as Arvan rejected even more embraces as he made his way forward. Around ten other *Krivann* were present from different regions and kingdoms but out of all the marauders, the king only approached one.

“What is your name, Son of blood?” the king said with his gaze fixated on Renavar’s dark eyes.

“Renavar Korsvann. . . my liege.” He said while bowing his head as he had no notion of what else to do.

"Son of Kors. Your mother is Helena, Cincia's chambermaid?"

"Yes." Renavar looked at Kanaan in confusion, but his eyes looked back but told the same tale. The King grabbed Renavar by his shoulders and neared his ear.

"I have found him too. She found him first. . . and so he silenced my beloved and soon he shall silence me too. *Vulker*, the traitor. . .the defier." King Arvan's eyes were bloodshot and dark bags surrounded them, but his expression indicated a strange sense of peace.

"I am not sure I understand. . ."

After a long silence between them had gone on as the other guests watched in confusion, the king finally spoke silently once more,

". . .The obsidian desert will be our reckoning--"

"My lord," Serro barged between them, "you must excuse my subject here. He has been in the north for three summers and has no knowledge of the current situations our Kingdom faces." Serro turned around to see Renavar, who stood in the same confused state, then whispered into his ear. His smile dropped when the King could no longer see it.

"Baron Vilavert is here, go see him."

"The king--"

"HE is not of best mind right now and I don't wish him to plague your mind with political ramblings on your first night back home, now go. The baron brought his daughter along with him. . ."

"How do you?"

"What kind of teacher would I be if I did not know my own students, let alone my nephew?"

Renavar tilted his head to see around Serro's and look upon the king once more. He was now staring at the floor as if he had fallen asleep while standing up. Serro turned back around and placed his good arm around the King before they returned up the stairs.

"What did the king say?" Kanaan quickly asked after closing the distance.

". . .He really has gone mad." He remained staring at the two men on the flight of stairs.

"No matter, come I think there is someone you might want to talk to."

Renavar looked at him while filling his cup once more with a long sigh out of respect to Bolit who stood behind the table, "Ingrid?"

"You saw her?"

"No."

"By the balcony. . . see her?" Kanaan looked at him again but now saw a slight smile on the edge of his lips.

Renavar looked once more at the flight of marble stairs. Gone.

"Is she angry?"

"Go ask her yourself." he pushed Renavar forward almost making him spill his wine. As he walked up to the baron and his family, which included his baroness and their only daughter, he noticed another *Krivann* with them. Replacement.

"Greetings Baron." Renavar put on his smile, but the Baron's seemed more genuine. Out of the corner of his eye he focused on Ingrid's, but she stood there with no excitement like how he thought she would react.

"Renavar! Child it has been too long, and clearly, it's not just me who noticed your return. . . don't let the King spoil your mood I'm sure Serro will comfort him!" Vilavert was exceptional at masking his true emotions. His head bared no hair, but his beard was longer than he remembered, though with his plump cheeks, he always looked comparable to innocent infants of which he was a father of many due to his Royal Blood.

"Indeed, too long." He gained the courage to look her in the eye and was surprised by what he saw. That smile, the one he remembered so fondly while sleeping on the hill nights prior. Her obsidian hair, darker than his, was braided along her temples but the rest was held loose as it flowed onto her shoulders. Her skin the same shade as his, the same as with the colour of their eyes, brown. Her lips the same shade as the blood crystals that he used in battle. She dressed in a black, sleeveless dress with blue lining and wore the silver leaf earrings that contrasted with her hair. A long thin obsidian shawl covered her bare shoulders.

"Renavar!" she never called his name in full, much like Kanaan, but today he was a stranger.

"Ingrid I—"

"Outside? I won't be able to hear you with all this. . . noise." She gestured with her hands towards the balcony, and he nodded. As they stepped out her smile remained, contrary to what Renavar expected. The Ocean of Black Sand could be seen as the balcony faced the south.

"How was your journey?" her smile still remained as her question resonated sincerity.

"Good. . . "

"Good?"

"I uh. . . found what I was looking for." He looked into her eyes to see if there was any change.

"That's. . . good."

A long pause ensued. Both of them kept their gazes on each other without a word to be said.

"I'm sorry, Ingrid."

"I know."

"Then why do you still smile?" he broke first, his brows now conveyed his failure as he felt remorse and couldn't bear to see her so distant with him.

"Because my emotions are for whom I trust." She truly was Vilavert's daughter, no doubt about it. He grabbed the wine glass with both his hands to lessen the spillage due to his trembling. No Draconid was a match for him, but she was far more terrifying.

Her smile still remained, "You told my father, but didn't think it important to tell me too?"

"I didn't know if you would agree—"

"And how could you know?" her smile finally faded, and her eyes finally told their truth, "Do you think of me so little? Think I'm unreasonable, selfish?" her tone got louder with every succeeding question.

"No—"

"Then what? Was I so unimportant to you?"

"Too important." he let out a sigh as her eyes became narrow, she didn't expect his move, "I didn't want to risk losing you. . . I was selfish and

unreasonable." She remained speechless, "I left because she needed me to. I wanted to take you with me, but your father would never have agreed." His hands finally became still.

He looked into her eyes to see the glistening within.

"I know it has been long, and I don't ask that you forgive me my selfishness. . ."

"Stop, you're making it too obvious. Father is looking our way." She turned away and rested on the balcony railing, looking on at the sands.

He followed her example and saw tears run down and fall into the courtyard below.

"Thank you, Ingrid." he pulled out the gold ring with agates and silver leaves set inside and placed it on his palm in front of her.

She looked at the ring and back at his eyes. Her's, now slightly red, met his gaze. He risked it. He showed his slight smile, his true emotions this time around. The risk paid off as she returned an equally genuine smile.

"I hate you. . ." She said while looking back at the desert to hide her face.

He gently grabbed her wrist and raised her shawl to look for the mark. It was there, the mark of bloodletting.

"I really am sorry."

"And you said that you don't want forgiveness--"

"That's not what I meant!"

"Oh, is that so, I guess you don't mean what you say then."

She looked at him once more while putting the ring on. Complete.

He finished the full glass of wine for some courage and placed it on the railing as she started walking away.

"Wait!"

"Do you mean those words, or do you just plan to lie again?" her smile was clear from the tone of her voice.

He stopped in front of her, "What is it you want from me?"

She looked up at him with her eyes alone which made him nervous once more, "Ren, it took you three cycles to come here and apologise to me. Thankfully, I don't take that long in my decision-making, so you'll have to be patient like how I was and wait a cycle or two. You're lucky your punishment doesn't fit the crime." She tried her best not to laugh after seeing the expression on his face. He let out a long sigh and did not dare to complain.

After looking at the door she pushed Renavar to the side out of view from the guests inside. She wrapped her arms around him and rested her head on his chest, "You're also lucky Kanaan vouched his heart out for you." After some time of shock, he placed his arms around her too.

After letting go she fixed her hair and shawl and put off her smile with some trouble, "...And I'm still deciding."

They both returned to the hall and listened to the ballads being played. Some were sung in the new tongue, but most were in old tongue indicating their age to be older than three hundred cycles old when the new tongue was introduced as the last decision that was agreed upon by all five kingdoms in the realm.

Renavar met Kanaan's gaze from across the room. He gave him a nod while glancing at Ingrid and Kanaan replied with a nod and a raising of his glass.

For three cycles he felt out of place like he didn't belong, but finally he felt he was truly back home with everyone who shared his heart.

Renavar looked around the room again looking for the King as the feast must have neared an end soon. He didn't see him. The ballads became quiet, but people still danced.

A ringing and a haze. His blood tattoos reacted, moving in strange patterns but not at Renavar's behest, it was a reaction to blood magic.

The *Krivann* who accompanied Vilavert came up to Renavar, "Who's casting?" he grabbed his head, but the pain was subtle. All the others felt it too, but the *Khrovann* felt nothing. . . they expected nothing.

"Damn it!" Renavar grabbed Ingrid and brought her to the floor, covering her body as the rest of the *Krivann* shouted for the guests to take cover.

The stained glass around the hall shattered and shards flew across the hall as one sliced Renavar over his right cheek. The walls rattled and chandeliers came loose and fell on unfortunate guests. The Western wall

completely gave way crushing those close enough. The screams of women followed.

His blood fell on her face as he got to his legs while keeping her down. He looked around and saw the other marauders scanning as well as some who ran outside to the balconies. When they deemed it to be safe everyone was allowed to get back up. The cries of women and children serenaded his thoughts.

“Ingrid, are you okay?”

“Yes. . . your cheek.” She wiped the blood off her face and wiped his wound with the same shawl.

Serro ran down the stairs alone and onto the balcony looking out to the west, towards the forests near the blackfalls.

“Father” Kanaan ran up to him. Serro’s arms were tensed and his tattoos flowed and warped inside his skin. “There was no dragon, they say they saw nothing-”

“Are you okay, son?” he nodded in response, “Come.” he grabbed Kanaan by his arm and walked to the entrance but stopped before opening it.

“Renavar, help the injured and see me after. Time is short now.”