

New Dawn of an Old Star

* * *

It begins, again.

The old man sits on his porch, staring out past an aged wood-carved railing at a vista of snow capped mountains. The sun falls slowly behind a horizon of jagged peaks, casting snow reflected light across the land and sky in a blaze of red hues.

But this is not what he sees.

Beyond the porch, mountains, setting sun, and space beyond he sees only the doorway come again -- renewed, relentless and insistent in its summons. With its reappearance comes the remembrance of what lies beyond its gates -- realms of light and order and belonging and understanding -- and of being thrust out through and into this harsh realm of the flesh. But he does not feel these as any dream or nightmare, just stored facts and images ever available for recall in the old man's mind. The doorway however, the doorway is felt and seen beyond everything.

The old man thinks to himself, "how long this time, how long will I resist the call?" Never before or now has it been a question of whether or not he will answer, or whether or not he will resist, or even why. It is merely a question of how long. As the question and its essential relation to his unchangeable nature rolls around in his mind, a mischievous grin creeps across his weathered face.

But the smile doesn't last long.

A shuffle from the house clears the smile from his face, but does not break his gaze from the doorway. The old man's wife peeks her head out and an affectionate smile lights up her aged face as she peers at her husband apparently so absorbed by the setting sun.

"Dinner," she says quietly, then adds with a grin, "not sure if your going to like it though."

Finally he breaks away from the doorway. Strange how the same old joke still remains funny after so long, but he doesn't smile or chuckle like he normally does. Already having slipped back in the house, she misses the pained grimace that grips the old man.

"How much am I to give up this time?"

He continues to question himself, knowing that no answer will mystically appear, but stops as he considers. Awaiting him is a fine meal and the presence of his wife, who's company he still enjoys after all these years. He is a lucky old man. He wipes the grimace from his face, sets the insistent call of the doorway firmly in the back of his mind, and picks himself up to enjoy a dinner with his beloved wife.

* * *

"David!"

The cry is filled with barely muted fear, boarding on panic. It forces the old man's head around to witness the arrival of a young man from the village. Once, the old man had lived in the village and helped govern it, but no longer. Now he merely lives nearby and occasionally helps the small community with his sage advice.

As the old man hears his name, he turns with a sigh, ready to meet whatever new apparent crises has arisen. As he does so, the tired look returns unbidden to his face, and he wonders just how exhausted he has become of this life.

“Please, David... you must come,” the youth’s voice is broken by deep gulps of air, “an exile... an exile has returned!”

As the word ‘exile’ is spoken a dramatic change overcomes the old man. Once stooped over with age, now the old man straightens and the fatigue disappears. His eyes sharpen, loosing the faraway look imposed by the demands of the doorway on his attention. David steps quickly from his porch, and purposefully strides past the young man towards the village.

Impatiently David looks behind him at the winded young man and snaps out, “well, lets go!”

From the porch, David’s wife watches them disappear, anguish and horror fighting for dominance of her face. It is unclear which of them wins out, but whichever of the two fuels her resolution, she hurries after them.

* * *

The village circle is an outcropping of solid bedrock, worn smooth by the boots of many generations. Radiating out from the circle is the village proper, a mere dozen buildings.

The sun, nearly set, cuts a swath of orange-red light across the pale smooth stone and the people there. However, torches have still been lit, many of them. As David attains the slightly elevated stone summit, he sees there is burning in their eyes.

It is the sudden harsh and wounded cry of his wife that stops him, his heart clutched in fear’s icy talons. She rushes past him, eyes only for their son standing rigid in the center of a ring of torch wielding villagers. Only then does David realize who it is and, for a moment, looses the harsh rigidness that his village has depended on for so many years. His son, come home, and unwelcome.

Like the starting horn for one of the village’s hunts, his wife’s cry sets the villagers towards their son. Anger courses through him, returning the old man to the authority that is David and a clear command of his own rings out, “leave him be,” halting the villagers in their tracks.

Laying his hand upon his wife’s shoulder, he maneuvers her back away from the mob of villagers and their flames, and away from the son they thought of as dead. David steps towards them all, noting in the peripheral of his awareness that every one of his steps causes the villagers to step back away. But not his son, who stands his ground and meets his father’s gaze without flinching.

“I, who was elder of this village for more years than many of you can count in the years of your own lives. I, who kept the sanctity of order, peace and tradition... I would hear my son speak, are there any who would deny me this?”

No one dares move to oppose David, so he turns towards his son.

His son speaks, “Father... I had to come home...”

“No!” His voice breaks through his son’s speech, “this is not your home, you know the laws you have broken... in returning, your life is forfeit.”

“Father... Mariam is with child...” Before he can continue, he is interrupted by the sudden sob from his mother, standing barely in check behind David.

“Mother... Mariam is... something is wrong!” With this admission, his voice cracks in desperation.

“Your union was a transgression!”

“I won’t apologize for loving her... ever!” A hard stubbornness stills the desperation in his voice. “Father!” He stops at that, a plea for help, but he won’t say please. David’s son does not beg, it is one of many traits they share.

The sun slips below the horizon and darkness spreads, reducing everyone to silhouettes against the torch flames. His plea is met with stares no longer fiery, but gone cold and hard and unmovable.

With a touch of sorrow and regret for his son’s mistakes, David points back out to the mountains. “You are exiled... nothing has changed my judgment in this, leave now... before even that choice is taken from you.”

Behind him, David can hear his wife sobbing. The steel in his voice drains away and once more David feels himself become the weary old man. He watches his son leap from the bedrock platform and flee the village.

* * *

His wife has finally fallen asleep, her face still wet with tears, and it is late into the night. The old man sits at a wood carved table sipping at some peppery tea gone cold. He’s noticed, but just doesn’t care. He waits to see if his wife will need further consoling and wonders whether or not she would accept his shoulder this time. She has always been a passionate one and to this day it is what most draws his love, but it doesn’t warm his heart tonight.

Is it different, this time? Must I weigh the consequences, the painful and pleasurable? Do I have my answer already? David sits still, awareness once more drawn to the doorway as thoughts and unresolved decisions burn through his mind.

“It is different this time... I would welcome the renewal the doorway brings,” he whispers to himself as revelation dawns.

David leaves his home behind, half empty and cold like the remnants of his cup of tea. Through the cool morning air he stalks with purpose, a new dawn already creeping its way up into the sky. He stops and kneels in frost glazed grass while rays of sunlight begin to dance across the sky. He takes no notice as it all pales in comparison with the doorway.

David recalls the gifts bestowed upon him from the realm beyond the doorway. With a thought, lines of bluish-white light twist into existence before him. They flow together into a complex puzzle of ordered matrices, then hover in complete stillness as David evaluates its perfection. His eyes glow with the same sharp light as the cube and with a flash from both, the cube launches into activity. It remains hovering, now a blur of illuminated motion as the matrices shift through constant reconfiguration.

The cube builds towards the culmination of his release and David feels the timer counting down.

* * *

The bright bluish-white light fades from his eyes as he steps through the chill morning. His gait relaxes, losing its touch of hardness, and the old man shuffles through the forest. He is not half way home when thick clouds of drifting smoke billow through the trees and engulf him. Within the haze he can make out distant and muffled screams of pain and terror... and rage and feral hunger. They raise the grey hairs on the back of the old man’s neck.

The old man wanders his way through the smoke, seeking his village, but doesn't make it. He stops dead when he stumbles across the fiery blaze that is... was his home. There is nothing he can do to stop the inferno. He can only look on in horror, noticing the sets of disfigured footprints leading in and leading out. No other footprints can be found but his own. Unless they carried her out, his wife is dead. He knows what has raided his village, but he does not know which fate he would prefer for his wife.

David's eyes begin to gleam once more with that spark of static energy. His wife deserved neither fate. The righteous rage that eats through him like a virus directs his will out to grasp at every gift of power and destruction he has access to.

Behind him someone steps out of the cover of the forest with an icy crunch onto the frosty ground. David hears this, but is already aware of the other presence. Without turning to ascertain who it is, David brings a massive curtain of electric blue power down upon whoever it is. The thunder shakes the entire area and rumbles down into the valley, almost drowning out David's roar of anger.

He turns, eyes lost in the lightening that burns in his sockets.

His son stands, crouched down, a small circle of untouched earth beneath his feet and a ring of lightening scorched destruction all around him. His eyes flicker with the same bluish-white power in David's. It is the only thing he recognizes in his son, who has become a twisted misshapen monstrosity of bulging limbs, unnatural cords of muscle and bony spikes.

"What have you done?" Disbelief quiets David's otherwise deep toned voice.

His son looks at him, and replies in a guttural, yet sad voice, "it was the only choice you left me..."

David turns away in stunned disbelief. He cannot believe it, in less than a day the doorway has returned, his wife has been taken from him, and his son has descended into abomination. He leaves it behind, walks away, not caring what his son does in response. Not caring what happens to the others. Just not caring.

* * *

He sits in the snow. He looks at the matrix steadily fading, counting down unto his reinsertion, unstoppable. He is the old man again. He would stay the old man, if he could. He knows this now, now that he has lost everything.

The world he thought he was weary of is gone and soon even this understanding of his loss will be torn away from him. The glitter of electric blue fills his vision, blurry through tear filled eyes. The matrix counts down.

* * *

The village is a ruin, still smoking after three long days. Few survivors remain. They bury the bodies and mourn them. They mourn for the village they have lost, and for those who remain unfound.

A young man enters the charred remnants of the village. He is tall and slender, with a strange handsomeness composed of sharp angles. His eyes are the electric blue of lightening.

The young man passes quietly through the graves, silent and alone. He finds the grave of an old woman who used to be the wife of the village elder. There is no grave for

that old man, one of the missing. He kneels at the grave and places a small sprig of heart-vine in the freshly churned dirt of her burial mound.

“Did you know her, stranger?”

The young man looks up at the youth, a survivor. He recalls the youth, and the youth’s family who are now gone. He nods and replies in a smooth even voice, “yes, I knew her, once.”

“Was she family?”

Again the young man nods and replies evenly, “she was the closest family I have ever had.”

The youth wipes a tear from his cheek, leaving a smear of mud across his face “I lost my family too...”

“You feel the pain of their absence... I felt as you do, once.”

The youth kicks a clod of dirt angrily, “I wish I didn’t feel anything at all!”

The young man places a hand on the youth’s shoulder, who calms immediately. “You carry them with you, your grief gives them meaning, a living memory you will carry and honor for all your years. Not all are blessed so.”

The youth stares into the cool eyes of the stranger, not understanding. He slaps the young man’s hand away and flees. The young man lets him go. As he makes his way out of the village several of the survivors petition his aid in rebuilding and making this place a home, a community once more. He calmly refuses.

* * *

The young man steps out of the village.

Memories of a former life, reduced to mere data, are compartmentalized.

Dawnstar steps into the world.

Beyond it all, the doorway calls.

And nothing holds him anymore from answering.