

The Story of Theia - Prologue

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The Story of Theia - Prologue

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Summary

The Story of Theia is a fantasy story, taken place in a fictional world called Theia, where daemons and humans live for thousands of years, ever since a sudden light shone across the world, uniting everyone. However, conflicts still lingers between humans and daemons. There are also plenty of secrets to discover in the world, such as the existence of ancient technology that were once used in the war, along with ruins, castles, and more.

Ara, a young woman, decides to explore the world to see what it has to offer. She may find herself in danger more often than not, but that never stops her from doing what she wants to do. With her book of endless pages in hand, and a robe that was crafted by her mother. She is one of many talented people of Theia, using her book and words as a weapon to defend herself.

The Writer and The Violinist

"Excuse me, Miss," spoke up a man, catching Ara's attention. She noticed he looked about his early thirties, but had a grey streak in his short, dark hair.

"Yes?" she asked, as she dragged her box of money closer to her. "You need something?"

"May I play along with you?" he replied, as he showed her his violin case.

She was taken aback by the request, but then quickly nodded with an enthusiastic smile. "Sure, let's!" she answered.

The man opened up his case to reveal the surprisingly beautiful, handcrafted bright blue violin. While they tuned their instruments, Ara could feel an almost overwhelming aura in the air. She grinned as she plucked her guitar. "You're a professional violinist," she said.

He gave her a smile in return as he took the bow, and ran it through the strings, starting off the song.

Passersby dropped money into Ara's box, while some stopped to listen and watch them play.

She couldn't compare herself to the talented man that played the music, then began to dance to attract even more people to them. It was easy to tell that the man carried a strong love for performance, which she found admirable. The two played on and on, until the man finished with a low bow to the large crowd.

Ara looked down at her aching fingers with a crooked grin, then wrapped them around the guitar to crush it into paper. "You really brought in a audience, stranger... how much money do you want?" she asked him, as she tossed the paper aside.

"I don't need money, Miss; I just wanted to be noticed again..." he replied as he watched the large number of people grow smaller. "You understand how it feels, don't you?"

Ara shrugged before she stuffed the large amount of money into her robe. "I am just a wanderer, stranger, not a professional musician."

The man turned on the ball of his foot, and pushed his violin towards Ara with a wide weary smile. "But you know how important it is, since you need money for your travels, Miss." He paused as he looked her over. "But... it's not your talent, is it?"

Ara nodded her head as she straightened out her robe. "You could say writing is my talent."

"Ah..." The man chuckled as he backed away from her. "Interesting..."

Ara felt slightly unsettled by him, so she decided it would be best to hurry to the train station now. "Thank you for playing along with me, stranger, but I need to go. I still have a lot to see out there, and lots of things to write about."

"Of course... It was a pleasure, Miss." The man bowed his head, then gave her a smile as she hurried away.

Then the sound of loud screech pierced her ears, locking her body up in place. Ara laughed. "Really?" she asked, while ink started to run down her arms. "Come on, stranger..."

The man grinned as he played a melody, that forced her body to dance along. Of course he would use her as a puppet, she thought. "What do you want?" she asked him.

"Show me what you can do, Miss 'Writer'..."

She huffed as she continued to dance unwilling. As Ara spun on the sole of her foot, she felt ink clog up her ears, which left her feeling disgusted, but it blocked out the music, giving her back her freedom. With a flick of her wrist, she wrote something in the air, which caused a gust of wind to blow the violinist back.

Ara took out her journal, as she approached the man. After writing something down on the last page, she tore it out, which was replaced by another piece of paper, then placed the torn piece on the man. The ink flowed out of her ear, as she turned away from the man.

"Stay completely still for one hour," the paper read. The man groaned as he couldn't even move a single finger, until a passerby, a woman with white hair, picked up the paper. The man quickly picked up his violin and bow, then ran off without bothering to thank the woman, but she didn't care.

She folded the paper to tuck it into her dress.

"Talented people can be the worse sometimes," Ara wrote into her journal. "I've met some that have used their talents for good, but there are plenty that abuse their powers to be the strongest one in the world, which is a difficult achievement. No one can be the 'God' of a specific talent, or else the world would be imbalanced... or so the legend goes. If it happens, then the daemons will come for you to test your power." Ara stopped as she looked at the people walking by. "But, that is also another myth, since there are already daemons walking around our world, minding their own business. Anyway, one can try to achieve perfection, but that's impossible. All that can be done, is just do the best that we can, and live. At least, that's what I prefer to do."

Ara sighed as she tucked the pen between the pages, and shut the book. She ran her fingers over the leather cover, remembering her father that had made it for her as a gift when she was young. She hugged the book close to her chest, while her robe brought a sense of warmth, a gift given to her by her mother before she left home on her eighteenth birthday.

"I don't want to go back, yet," she whispered to herself. "I still have a lot of the world to see..."

The Tale of Sol City Part 1

Ara stared outside the window, unable to see anything, except leaves growing on the rocky mountains. But, she knew what was beyond that. Far, far beyond the mountains, land, and borders.

Her home.

And the Tower that Reached Paradise, or so the villagers, and her family, called it.

A wistful smile played on her face, but she was determined to carry on travelling, until she no longer could, and that would only happen, when she goes back home. Until then, with her colorful robe on her back, and her Book of Endless Pages in her hand, both given as gifts to her by her parents, she would travel as far as possible, from Rios, to Elios, and hopefully across the seas itself, into Diso, and more.

At least she has been to the Drifting City, which was a great accomplishment. Not a lot of people ever get the chance to visit it, considering it's strict rules for tourism and population. Ara couldn't help but laugh to herself at that memory.

She then stopped when she realized that the train had come to a halt, even though they weren't close to reaching their stop. Ara got up from her seat slowly, and took out her book, along with her pen.

The windows were covered in a very thick, dark fog, making it difficult to see what was outside.

As she reached to the end of the car, she noticed the fog was rolling in from underneath. Ara opened up her book, letting it flip into the latest blank page, and kept her pen on it, as she slowly stepped back.

Slowly, the door opened, letting the fog in.

Ara didn't realize until it was too late that she was suffocating as it surrounded her. With a single word on the page, "Wind," she ripped it out, and it was ripped apart by air that helped her breathe, by pushing the fog back.

This was no fog, she thought. It was smoke and gas.

As she was about to write down another word, she noticed someone, or rather something, stepped inside the car. At first, it was difficult to tell what they were, because of the fog, but when they came forward, she was startled at the sight of a skeleton.

They were surprisingly well dressed, and held a pipe in hand, that blew out the smoke that surrounded them. The skeleton tilted their head, while Ara wrote down "Exorcise," and threw the page towards the skeleton, only for it to dissolve into ashes.

She gasped as she backed away in fear, until something caught her leg, and before she realized it, the smoke forced itself into her nose, suffocating her, until she was knocked out.

Ara woke up with a start, only to find herself in a cabin. As she tried to breathe, she realized that there was no window to open.

"The Writer?" a man with an accent spoke up, catching her by surprise.

She frowned when she realized it was the skeleton she had encountered. "What is an undead doing in a train?!" She then noticed her book in his lap. "And that's my book!" she shouted as she nearly jumped from her seat, only to be forced back down by the smoke that kept her pinned down.

As hard as she tried, she couldn't do anything against them. Even as ink surrounded her skin, any word that she wrote in the air vanished.

The skeleton inhaled smoke from the pipe, letting it escape from their body, which mixed with the dark cloud surrounding them, before they turned the page. "You certainly have been to quite a lot of places... but, you haven't explored all of Theia, little one."

Ara gasped. "Little?!" she yelled.

"Yes, little... Anyway, you told me that I am undead... does it bother you?"

"Of course it does! The undead shouldn't be roaming Theia! They should be buried or burn, because they don't have a soul!"

The skeleton hummed as they sucked on the pipe. "You're not wrong, I guess... but, tell me, don't others discriminate when they learn that you are a half-human, half-daemon being?"

Ara scowled as unpleasant memories stirred. "S-so? It's not the same."

"Ah, but it is, short one."

Ara growled. "Stop calling me that!"

"And call you, 'The Writer', like you prefer many times before? Or rather Ara? Your real name."

"I deserve to be called 'The Writer'! Don't you see, you stupid skeleton!"

They chuckled as they shut the book. "You know, you shouldn't call me such things, if you know what's good for you."

Before she knew, the book disintegrated before her eyes, giving her a great shock. "N-no! My dad... My dad gave me that when I was five, you idiot!" Tears began to well up in her eyes as she struggled even harder to fight against the smoke.

The skeleton watched as the ink that surrounded her body grew thicker, but the words she wrote in the air vanished.

In short time, Ara started to feel sick, and forced herself to stop. "You... stupid... skeleton..." she huffed. "I... why?!" She couldn't hold back her tears anymore.

The skeleton sighed as they raised their bony finger to her face. "You think you deserve such a title, then prove to me that you do... But, first, I do have to ask, have you met anyone strange in particular? Goes by the name of 'Q' lately."

Ara paused, then shook her head. "If I did, I would have recorded it in my journal, which you burned, by the way!"

The skeleton chuckled with a shrug. "Well, that is rather unfortunate. I had hoped you had encountered him at some point..." The skeleton then got up to face the door. "Anyway, my time here is done."

"Hey, wait! Don't think I'm done with you!"

The skeleton let out a puff of smoke, before turning back to Ara. "Tell me, little one, what do I look like to you, exactly?"

"W-what? An unde-" "No, I'd meant, what am I exactly, in your eyes."

"A... skeleton..."

"Ah... interesting. Very well, you may call me, 'Skully'. Nice name, don't you think? Fitting, I'd think so."

Ara never felt so lost, until the skeleton placed their hand on the door. "Also, if you're questioning if I am male or female, I'd prefer male... Not that it really matters, but people don't ask that often."

"But," Ara spoke up, "you're a skeleton."

Skully said nothing as he opened the door, then closed it behind him, letting all the smoke in the room disappear with him.

As soon as she could, Ara got up, and opened the door, but the skeleton was nowhere in sight. She then felt something oddly heavily in her robe.

To her surprise, it was her journal.

She opened it to check the pages, to see everything was still intact, more or less, except she noticed something written on the last page.

"Dear Short One,

I must say, you've caught my interest, but despite your history, you still have a long way to go. I will be looking forward to seeing you again in the future, but if you ever meet the man

calling himself 'Q', run. Run as fast as you can.

Until the next time we meet, stay safe.

Sincerely, Skully."

Ara frowned, and was about to tear off the page, but found herself reluctant to do so. There was something about this meeting that bothered her, and it seems that this "Skully" was kind enough to give her a warning. With a deep breath, she shut the book, and sat in a nearby seat, where she could see the landscape.

This encounter was too important to not write about, she thought.

As soon as the train arrived to Sol City, Ara left the train in a hurry. She was so focused on leaving the station, she accidentally bumped into someone that cursed out in a foreign language.

"Sorry," she said to them, quickly taking notice of their short pink hair, framing their dark skin.

They stared at her with thinned lips, then shook their head. "It's all right..." they said. "It's-"

"Train leaving Sol City will depart soon," spoke up the announcer, interrupting the stranger mid sentence.

Their eyes shifted to the train, while they began to shuffle their feet towards it, until they suddenly stopped.

Ara watched them turn around and walk out of the station in a fast pace, which made her curious and worried.

But before she could leave, a security guard warned her to check at a gate, to get her passport stamped. She already lost the stranger in the crowd.

The Tale of Sol City Part 2

Ara was captivated by the beautiful flora right outside the train station. From the brochure she picked up, Tibou, one of three locations that make up Sol City, is well known for its beautiful plants, since they all seem to tend to themselves.

Ara raised her hand up to a leaf, and thought it twitched for a moment, before it blew away with the wind. She laughed briefly at the sight, before making her way down the sidewalk. It certainly seemed alive, she thought. She could smell the scent of life in the air, which carried something strong, like cinnamon. (An odd thing she noticed when she was a child, but was a shared trait with her older siblings, thanks to their mother.)

She started to wonder if Celeste carried the scent of the ocean, since it's supposedly very well known for its wide and beautiful sight of the sea. Well, anyone could, she realized, but there is always something hidden beneath the scent, much like Tibou.

But, what caught most of her interest is Marrow, the third part of Sol City. It has plenty of guards secured around the borders, preventing any outsiders, including tourists, inside. There has to be a way around it, Ara pondered, there is usually a way when it comes to "Secured" areas.

She will figure that out eventually. For now, she wanted to see what Tibou and Celeste has to offer, before she jumps into what could potentially be "The Danger Zone."

Especially since she couldn't pass up the chance to see the famous tree, "The Divines' Gift."

In the center of Tibou, surrounded by a wide gate, is a large tree that reached halfway up the tall buildings that was built around it. From what was written in the brochure, it's name was given by divine beings, that was sent down from the skies above, to protect humans that were being attacked by daemons, long, long ago. It supposedly grew big in one single day, to shield the humans away from vicious daemons, but there have been tales of plant like beings emerging from the tree itself, to take the lives of the daemons.

As their blood was splattered across the originally green grass, the tree absorbed it into its roots, turning its leaves into the crimson color it is now, along with the grass. Knowing that they are safe, humanity decided to built their life around the tree, letting it prosper and grow with, the city as life progressed.

Eventually, the small shelter became to be known as Sol City.

But, it is just a legend, Ara thought, as she tucked the brochure into her robe. It has been many years since then, and story that had been passed down through time, may had changed because of how much the language itself has changed.

After all, no one can speak the language of The Ancients these days, except for a select few.

Before the memory could surface, the sound of a man's voice interrupted her thought. "Hello, beautiful. Lovely day, isn't it?" he asked, with a charming smile that took Ara by surprise.

She then blinked as she realized that this person is definitely not human, if he could charm her so easily. "Sure is... if you plan on picking up normal people, incubus," she replied, as she wag her finger at him.

The man was taken aback, before he let out a snort. "I see that my friend was right, then."

"Friend?"

The man pointed his finger over his shoulder, towards a heavily robed figure standing watch.

"Okay..." Ara said as she turned back to the man. "So, incubus, what's your name?"

"Not if you tell me yours first," he replied with a grin.

Ara opened her mouth to call herself "The Writer," but the image of the skeleton back on the train flashed before her eyes, before those words could leave her mouth. Skully, he called himself, she remembered. To tell her that she doesn't deserve to call herself that bothered her, as much as she didn't want to admit it. Through clenched teeth, she said, "Ara... My name is, Ara."

The man took note of her behavior, but quickly dismissed it with a smile, and a nod. "I'm Matt. So, Miss Ara, even though you're clearly not from around here, tell me, what'd brought you to this city?"

"Honestly? This tree in particular. I've come to see the famous 'Divines' Gift' myself, after hearing some rumors about it."

"Rumors?"

"Yep." Ara turned to the tree with a small smile. "I've heard... it's dying."

Matt's smile disappeared, to be replaced by a slight frown. He turned to his friend briefly, before he told Ara, "What you had heard is true... it is dying..."

Ara's face fell as her heart sank. How unfortunate, she thought. "Is that why daemons are free to roam around, like you and I?"

"If we can disguise ourselves, yes. If not, we stay in the Marrow."

"Ah, so the Marrow is populated by daemons... good to know why they want to keep it 'secured' then."

Matt chuckled. "There are ways around it... but something tells me you might have some idea about that." He then leaned in closer to her to whisper, "There are tunnels here and there, under the city. Think of them as... 'shortcuts' to some areas. However, some have been blocked by strange technology. If you see them, don't mess with them, because that's how

they find you..." As he slowly backed away he gave her a wink. "But, you're not a full daemon, are you?"

Ara stared at him from the corner of her, but said nothing.

He took that as a "Yes," then nodded firmly.

"Hey, Matt! It's time!" shouted the robed figure in the distance.

"Fine, fine!" he shouted back, then turned to Ara. "Stay safe, Miss," he said, before he walked towards the figure.

Ara noticed the way Matt wrapped his arms around the waist of the person, which made her wonder if he was attempting a chance at something specific. Incubi and Succubi adore to have as much lovers as possible, be it strictly romantic or sexual. In short, they have quite an adventurous life, she thought, in a different way than hers.

Ara let her fingers trace the white railing that kept people away from the tree. As she was about to catch a falling leaf, she noticed a familiar looking person sitting on a bench nearby. They had their head buried in their heads, which made her pity the person.

With a smile, she approached them, and greeted them with, "Hello, may I sit here?" catching them by surprise.

They stuttered as they quickly looked around the area, then was about to get up, only to be stopped as Ara stretched out her hand to them. "Calm down, I'm not asking you to leave," she said, before taking her seat next to them. "My name is... Ara. What's yours?"

The person was quite at a loss, before they took in a deep breath, and replied, "I'm Osiris... Osiris Clement."

A human, she thought. "You seem troubled, Clement. I know we are total strangers, but I will be glad to hear you out, if you don't mind."

"I..." They stopped mid sentence, then cleared their throat. Their pink hair was quite curly, and framed their feminine face well, though their voice was quite deep. "I'm sorry, young Miss, but it's very personal..." They then noticed her robe change color as she shifted in her seat. For a moment, Osiris thought they were seeing things, and lifted up their glasses to rub their eyes, but once they adjusted it back on, her robe certainly had changed color. "Does... that...?"

Ara tilted her head, before realizing that the robe has caught their attention. With a smile, she lifted up her arm to let the sun's rays hit it. Osiris found themselves speechless as they slowly reached out to touch it, before quickly retreating their hand. "I... should apologize," they said.

"Ah, it's okay. By the way, are you a Mr. or Ms. Clement, or do you prefer neither?"

Osiris blinked in confusion, before they let out a brief, shaky laugh. "That's... an odd question. I'd prefer Mister, if I wasn't a Doctor."

Ara eyes widen in surprise. "Doctor?! You're a doctor?! Of what kind?!"

The way she suddenly became so forward made Osiris jump. "Um... I-its..."

Then, the sound of something ringing made him freeze up. "Excuse me, young Miss... I must take this call."

Ara noticed how he trembled as he got up while searching his pockets for his phone. Once he found it, his trembling thumb pressed the accept button, before he raised it up against his ear. Before he could even say a word, Osiris shut his lips tight.

Then, he replied in an almost robotic tone, "I will be there as soon as possible. Forgive me, Dr. Burns."

"Hey...!" Ara spoke up, but Osiris ignored her as he turned to walk away. Or he might not have heard her, she thought, because there was something in his behavior that seemed quite familiar.

A scowl formed on her face as she got up from the bench. She already has an idea on what to do, if they meet again.

And she has no plan on leaving Sol City, until she does.

The Tale of Sol City Part 3

Chapter Notes

There are a bunch of songs that I associate with this story... Oof.

Considering how big Sol City is, Ara had no trouble hiding away somewhere to sleep for the night. She looked up at the dark sky, noticing there were hardly any stars in sight. Not unusual when it comes to being in a city, she thought, but it is rather unfortunate.

When she traveled through the jungles in Rios, the sight of a million stars glowing across the dark sky was breathtaking. There were also the sounds of the wildlife that she missed. Croaking frogs, buzzing insects, birds singing. The flowing rivers between the cracks of the earth, running down to who knows where.

Ara sighed as she clung onto her robe with teary eyes.

She was becoming homesick again.

A laugh escaped from her as soon as she felt the cool touch of air brush against her cheeks. "I miss you, Mama," she whispered, hoping that the wind would carry those words back to her island where she lived. Somewhere deep down, Ara believed it almost always reaches her mother's ears.

Ara shut her eyes as she laid down on her robe. May tomorrow be a good day, she thought, before she drifted off to sleep.

The city was as lively as yesterday, Ara realized, when she walked among the civilians. It was easy to tell she is an outsider, thanks to her disheveled appearance, and robe, but no one seemed interested enough to stop and ask her. It wasn't really a bad thing, since she doesn't mind talking to people about her journey so far, but there was something pleasant about being left alone too.

A strange, complex mixture of her social life, she thought, then shrugged it off.

As soon as she spotted a sandwich shop, Ara didn't notice the light had changed, as soon as she bolted across the street. She was quickly tackled towards the ground, nearly getting the wind knocked out of her, only to notice that she wasn't hurt at all. Instead, she was laying on the pavement, surrounded by a bright light, in the arms of a stranger.

A stranger with pink hair and olive skin.

"Osiris?" she gasped.

He gave her a puzzled look. "You... know my name?" he asked. "Wait! Wait! First of all, are you hurt?"

Ara blinked, then moved her body. "I think everything is pretty much intact... why?"

Osiris turned away from her to look at the car that bashed into the bubble they were in. Fortunately, the driver was alive. Unfortunately, they were shouting words at them that couldn't be heard, thanks to the sound of various people honking their horns. He huffed as he slowly got up with her. "You caused this," he pointed out.

Ara's eyes widen. "Ah... whoops..."

"Excusez-moi?" he asked her with a scowl. Osiris then shook his head, as he lowered the bubble surrounding them with a wave of his hand, and dragged her to the nearest bench. "Sit down and stay put. The police are coming, and will have to speak to you about what you had done."

Ara was more surprised about the bubble than the police. "So you're more than just some doctor..." she said.

Osiris gave her a look. "Okay, stop talking, you are confusing me."

Ara hummed lowly as she tapped her chin. "We had met before, Dr. Clement... Back in the park, where The Divines' Gift is...? Don't you remember?"

Osiris stared at her for a moment, then noticed the way her robe had changed colors as she tried to take back her arm. He blinked in surprise before he released her. "It's coming... back to me..." he muttered, then cleared his throat. "Your name is... Ara, right?"

She gave him a wide smile and a nod. "You remembered!"

"Yes... yes, I have a decent memory when it comes to people's names... but, right now, that doesn't matter. What does, is that you've caused a major accident! An accident that nearly killed you, if it wasn't for me jumping in to save your life."

"Oh... ah... Thanks!" Ara forced a chuckle, before she huffed and turned back to the cluster of cars and angry people. She twiddled her fingers as she shifted in her seat. "Well... as you've said, I should stay put, right? The police will want to talk to me... and all that..."

Osiris sighed as he fixed his tie. " *We* will have to stay put..."

When the police, ambulance, and fire trucks arrived, they quickly sorted out the situation with the civilians, while interrogating both Ara and Osiris. They took note of her being a tourist, and gave her a stern warning, while thanking Osiris for saving her life. Ara felt happy that she didn't get arrested for jaywalking, again.

As soon as things had settled down enough to go back to normal, which took a few hours, Ara felt her stomach rumbled. She groaned as she turned to the shop, only to see that it has closed down thanks to the accident.

Osiris gave her a look, before he asked, "You just wanted food, didn't you?"

"Yeah..."

"Come with me then. There are plenty of other places that are opened around this area."

Ara eyes widen, before she gave him a smile. "Thank you, Dr. Clement!" she said.

"Ah," Osiris raised up a finger, "please call me, Osiris. I don't like being called 'Dr. Clement' outside of work... makes me feel like I am my father." He then waved his hand at her to follow him.

"Are you on bad terms with your father?" she asked.

"No, not at all... but, I prefer to keep my personal life... personal, you understand?"

"That's understandable, Doc- I mean, Osiris."

Osiris chuckled.

Ara didn't expect Osiris to bring her to a really fancy restaurant. What also caught her eye was the all you can eat deal on the menu. She didn't hesitate to order as much as she could, which made Osiris worried, because he wanted to pay for their meal himself.

While she twirled the straw in the large glass of water, with a slice of lemon inside, Ara began to sing quietly to pass the time. Osiris tapped his fingers against the wooden table with a raised brow. "If I may ask, Ara, are you perhaps... one of those talented people?"

She stopped singing as soon as she looked up at him. A playful smile crept on Ara's lips as she took a sip of water. "First off, I want to ask you something. How did you do that... bubble thing earlier?"

Osiris snort. "Ah right... Well, that's a secret..."

"Oh, come on!" she squealed through clenched teeth. "You got to tell me!"

"I'd rather not."

"Why?"

"It's personal."

She groaned. "Of course it is... Fine, what about this, I tell you a little bit about myself, and you tell me a little bit about yourself, okay?"

"I already know some things about you, thanks to the police reports, like that you've come from Rios, Ara, and you're a traveler... but, I guess I can tell you that I'm from Bijou, and I moved here to Elios around... a year or two ago."

Ara blinked. "Okay then, good. To answer your question - yes, I am talented. I'm a writer."

"A writer? Really?"

She pulled out her book from her robe, getting a look of surprise from Osiris, with how unexpectedly thick it is with pages. How could she fit that in her robe, he wondered.

"Yes. You said you're a doctor, right? What kind?"

Osiris took a sip of his drink. "I work in studying the ancient language and artifacts. You know, the ones that existed a long time ago, made by humans, to use in wars against daemons? That kind of work."

Ara frowned slightly. "Really? That's... unexpected. You are trying to decipher the words, or what...?"

"More or less. But, that's personal."

Ara laughed. "Of course. But, I'm warning you, Osiris, if you explore these things without caution, it will do more harm than good."

"You know this from personal experience?" Osiris asked with a raised brow.

She huffed as she opened her journal to a specific page. "Yes... I've many near death experiences with ruins filled with artifacts, and have witnessed people destroy themselves over these objects. It tends to get into people's heads, and twist them in a way that makes them very, very violent."

"A risk that I'm very aware of," Osiris muttered.

Ara turned to him with pursed lips. Before she could speak, the waiter arrived with their food. She shut the book and tucked it into her robe, before she started to munch on the fries first. "Well, that's that, I guess... if you're aware of the risks, then I have nothing else to say. But, it would be a shame if you die, I think... You don't seem like a bad guy, Osiris."

"You barely know me, Ara."

"Maybe... but, I sometimes have this feeling about people, you know? I guess it's just a feeling, after travelling for about... six years, I think."

"Six years? How old are you?"

She shrugged. "Twenty-something."

"Twe-" Osiris stopped mid sentence to laugh. "You look a lot younger than that, Ara."

She gave him a wink. "Looks can be deceiving."

He chuckled. "I suppose that's true..." Osiris then became silent as soon as he heard his phone ring. "Excuse me," he said, with no hint of emotion in his voice, "I have to go."

Ara frowned, but before she could stop him, he got up from the table and walked away. Something is definitely wrong, she thought. "Um... Check please!"

After spending money for a room in a motel, Ara frowned at the sight of how much she had left. Nothing that can't be solved with some music, she thought, as she tucked away it away back into her robe. She then took a shower, and washed her clothes, to get rid of the feeling of dirt and grime on her body.

While the clothes dried on the rack, Ara pulled out another set of clothes from her robe to slip into for the night. As soon as her head hit the pillow, she drifted off to sleep.

Ara felt the boat rocking gently against the waves. She sat up to see that the world was devoid of color; as always, and looked down at the black sea. She dipped her hand into it, staining her hands with ink, then turned to the small child sitting across from her.

Her green eyes were the only thing that brought some hint of life in this empty world. The child pointed up at the pelicans that flew high above. Ara noticed that one of them was struggling to keep up with the rest, but was attacked by another pelican that was bigger than it, forcing it back.

Ara quickly stood up to catch the pelican, only for it vanish before it could land in her arms. She looked at the child with widen eyes.

"Do you know what papa once told me?" she asked. "Heroes can't save everyone, but they always try their best to save at least one person anyway."

Ara smirked as she slowly sat down on the boat. "Your papa is a smart man."

The child's eyes twinkled as she gave Ara a smile. "Please tell him, that I love and miss him, okay?"

"I will, Maria. See you."

"See ya, Ara."

The child disappeared in a blink of an eye, leaving Ara to stare at the rest of the pelicans. "Of course, he doesn't need me to tell him that," she whispered. "But, I know a message when I see one." She leaned back into the boat, with her hands behind her head with a smirk.

The Tale of Sol City Part 4

Chapter Notes

(Rushing it now... hmm...)

Ara stood off to the side in the park, where she could see The Divines' Gift, as she played her guitar. Many passerby came and went to drop some money into her bucket, but none of them looked familiar. No sign of Matt, his partner, or Osiris.

She did not stop performing, however, and kept playing, until she felt her wrists ache. At least she earned enough money for lunch, she thought, as she picked up the bucket to feel its weight. At least for three days, if she spends it wisely.

Once she pocketed the money, Ara turned the guitar back into paper, and looked up at the tree. She shut her eyes to focus on the air around her. To her surprise, she didn't realize how many daemons mingled with humans, as they walked past the dying tree. A laugh escaped from her when she opened her eyes.

Are humans not aware of them, or do they chose to overlook that? Whatever the reason was, Ara was all too familiar about discrimination against daemons, and vice versa.

Being the mix of those two is no help, either, from personal experience.

"Tainted blood," some had called her. "Freak of nature, a blasphemous being," and worse.

Ara breathed out a heavy sigh to calm herself from her anxiety.

What's worse, is that she heard so many people in her village call her that, because of what she is. "A daemon that will bring misfortune," they'd claimed.

If it wasn't for her mother, Ara probably would had died before she reached childhood.

As soon as she felt a hand on her shoulder, Ara jumped with a sword in her hand, and nearly chopped Matt's head off as she spun around, if he had not blocked it with his bare hand. He looked at her with a raised brow as she turned the sword back into ink, then pulled out a gauze to give to Matt for his bleeding hand. "Sorry..." she said, as he took it.

He smirked as he shrugged dismissively. "At least you didn't mean to attack me," he replied, while he wrapped the gauze around his injury. "Anyway, good to see you're still in Sol City. How's your day been?"

"It's been pleasant, but..." Thoughts of Osiris popped into her head. "I've met someone..."

"Ah, fallen for a local?" Matt chuckled. "That's romantic."

Ara shook her head slowly as she explained, "No, I'm more worried, than anything... I mean... I think this man is being... abused."

Matt's brows furrowed as he didn't expect that at all. "Abused? Really? How would you know?"

"I... can't exactly say, because this sort of abuse is much more mental, than physical, but even then, it's not like I can ask, 'Can you please take off your clothes, so I can check if you're injured.' Whatever is going on, I want to find out."

Matt hummed thoughtfully as he dug his hands into his pockets. "Are you sure you want to get involved with something like this, Ara? I'm not saying you shouldn't, but..."

"I know, you can't expect people to be saved from this sort of thing, but I can at least try," Ara said firmly, recalling her dream from last night.

She quickly stood up to catch the pelican, only for it vanish before it could land in her arms. She looked at the child with widen eyes.

"Do you know what papa once told me?" Maria asked. "‘Heroes can’t save everyone, but they always try their best to save at least one person anyway.’"

Matt paused as he gave Ara a skeptical look, before he shrugged. "Fine, I'm not going to stop you from doing what you want to do, but be careful, Ara. After watching the news, I get this awful feeling you tend to get involved in some questionable business."

Ara blinked. "Wait, news? I was on the news?"

"What, you don't watch television?"

She shook her head.

"Ah... well, I guess it doesn't really matter." Matt shrugged, then gave her a firm pat on the shoulder. "I got to go do some shopping... try not to cause any more traffic jams, okay?"

"I can't exactly promise that," she replied with a grin.

Matt chuckled, unsure if she was joking or not, before he walked past her.

He seemed to be alone this time, she noticed.

Ara started to hum a melody as she walked out of the park. She kept her eyes open for any signs of the cloaked figure, or Osiris, but neither appeared.

Even though she knew it was unlikely, she couldn't help but feel disappointed.

Believing she saw everything she could in Tibou, Ara made her way to Celeste. The buildings were much more modest, than the ones in Tibou, filled with small shops of all sorts, and plenty of restaurants that caught Ara's attention. From the surface, a majority of them seem to welcome people of all sorts, but she was quick to notice that the food was quite expensive.

A fast food place is better than any of these restaurants, she thought.

But, the local businesses and restaurants weren't the real reason why she came here. As soon as she caught whiffed of the ocean, Ara hurried over to the beach that was supposedly one of the major attractions that brings in tourists. She learned why, as soon as she saw it with her own eyes.

The bright blue ocean stretched out far and wide before her eyes. Ara chuckled at the thought at how everything is connected by the ocean, and no matter how far she is from home, she can feel that connection in her heart. Even if she couldn't see the tower that showed her where the island is.

The soft sand sunk under her weight, with every step she took to reach the waters. She dipped her bare feet into the water, letting it wash away the sand covering them. Ara began to hum a melody as she looked up at the sky that matched the ocean, and saw seagulls flying high above.

The sight of them reminded her of The Drifting City, which made her heart ache. She took in a deep breath, letting in the ocean breeze into her lungs, then exhaled out slowly, before she turned away to leave the beach.

Ara was surprised to see a theater in the city, with all sorts of movies on display. As she looked through the list, she caught the sight of a pink haired man in the corner of her eye. "Osiris?" she called out, catching him by surprise.

"Ah... Ara... is it?" he replied with a chuckle, that really came across as nervous to Ara.

"Yes... are you okay?"

Osiris blinked, then nodded with a smile. "I am... why do you ask?"

Ara frowned slightly at his response. "You seem nervous... are you here on a date, maybe...?"

Osiris was taken aback by her question. "What gives you that idea?"

"I don't know... would answer a few questions I have."

"What sort of questions?"

"I-" Ara was about to ask if he was dealing with some sort of abusive figure in his life, but then realized he wouldn't tell her the truth, if he was. Besides, why would he tell a stranger about his life, she thought. "I just... wanted to get to know you a bit better. I mean, I traveled from Rios to here, learning a bit about people, and it's so much fun to learn something about them. But, I guess asking if you're on a date is a bit intrusive."

Osiris smirked, before he sighed and turned to the movie posters. "I was originally supposed to be here on a date... but... well... I'm alone, again."

"Again?"

"Y-yeah..." He scratched the back of his head idly. "I mean... our jobs do take up a lot of our time, but I usually try to take breaks, and live my life, even though I... well... I love him, you understand?"

Ara inclined her head as she gave Osiris a sorrowful look. "I do... but, if he cares about you, wouldn't he be here with you? It isn't my place to say this, but you need to talk to him about it."

"I have... but... ah... It doesn't matter. I want to support him, so I'm going to try my best to be there for him... no matter... what."

Ara pursed her lips, then gave him a nod. "Okay then... if that is what you wish, Osiris." She then gave him a gentle pat on the arm, which made him flinch with a sharp hiss. "Are you okay?" she asked as she backed away.

"Y-yes... just... got hurt that's all."

"How?"

Osiris frowned slightly as he wrapped his hand around his arm. "Accident... that's all."

"Right..." Ara gave him a forced smile. "Accidents do tend to happen... Anyway, I'm going to go watch a movie... but, I am kind of lost about what to watch... Is there anything that you can recommend me?"

Osiris eyed the posters, to find one that was an action movie. "That one in particular caught my eye for a while."

Ara hummed thoughtfully. "Seems pretty dumb... Let's watch it together!"

"*Quoi?*" Osiris gasped.

"I know, we are total strangers, but you did recommend it! Here, half of my money!" She pulled out a thick amount of dollar bills from her robe, which surprised Osiris more than the fact she just asked him to watch a movie with her.

"*Non, non, non, attendez une minute!*" Osiris shouted.

Ara inclined her head with a smile. "I don't speak Bijou, Osiris."

He stopped himself to clear his throat, then gave Ara a quizzical look. "You are being too forward, Ara. I'm sorry, but I have to decline."

Ara shrugged. "That's fair. I wasn't really asking for a date, mind you - I just wanted to hang out."

Osiris shook his head as he said, "I'm not comfortable with the idea of 'hanging out' with a stranger..."

"But, you did buy me food, Osiris."

"That was out of kindness!"

"Okay, what about this, then? I pay for both of our tickets myself?"

Osiris blinked as he shook his head. "You... are strange, Ara. Sorry, but, no."

"What about another day, then?"

"No. Now, if you would please excuse me."

Osiris brushed past Ara, giving her a chance to slip a piece of paper into his pocket. She watched him walk away with a smile, before she approached the ticket booth.

The movie was okay, Ara thought. Exciting, but bland, which is good enough for an action movie. When she looked up at the sky outside of the theater, she realized how much time has passed, since it was starting to become dark. An idea then popped into her mind, as she decided to travel back to Tibou.

When it became dark, Ara climbed over the fence that surrounded The Divines' Gift. She looked around cautiously as she made her way to the thick roots, and knelt down to lay her hand over the bark. It cracked under her touch, which didn't surprise her, given that it is a dying tree.

However, she could feel something. She shut her eyes to focus, and felt a weak heart beat compared to her own. Soft whispers of various voices tried to tell her something, which unfortunately fell flat as soon as she heard the sound of someone's footsteps crush the leaves beneath them. Ara got up to face the stranger, to see that they were a daemon.

An earth daemon, that was born from nature, and took a shape of its own. This one in particular decided to take the form of a human, with red skin, and magenta eyes that glow in the darkness. "You can feel it, can you?" they asked.

"Who are you?"

The daemon chuckled as they took slow steps towards her. "My name is Axton. I am Matt's partner."

Ara's eyes widen. She then gave him a crooked grin. "I see. You were there when I first spoke to Matt, right?"

"Yes."

"And the reason why Matt knows what he does about The Divines' Gift, is because you were born from this tree, right?"

Axton shook his head slowly. "No, I came from somewhere far away from here, actually. I've only stumbled upon this tree several months ago, and felt that something was wrong... So, I've stayed in Sol City since then, hoping to find answers."

"And...?"

"I did, to say the least, but not all of them." Axton approached the tree to plant their hand against the bark. "Did you hear them, by any chance? The voices?"

"I have... They sounded like... they need help..."

Axton hummed lowly in response. "I believe... they are being tortured in some way... As if... they are losing their power, because of something... Which should be impossible, because this tree is meant to be so powerful, nothing could destroy it."

Ara frowned slightly. "Of course, being a gift from the Divines and all..." She paused as she looked around them, to see the buildings that surrounded the park, all made from metal and more. She then noticed something slithering in the darkness, and pulled out her journal. "Axton," she spoke up, taking their attention away from the tree.

They scowled as soon as the figure rose up from the grass, and stared down at them. It had no figure, face, or eyes. Ara sucked in a deep breath as it lowered itself down to their level. As she slowly breathed out, the creature stood still.

Axton wasn't sure what to do, as they watch Ara stand before it. She raised her hand towards it, to try to touch their body, but it backed away immediately, and sunk into the ground. Before either one could say a word, a cloud of gas surrounded them, knocking them both out within seconds.

The Tale of Sol City Part 5

Chapter Notes

(Spira Mirabilis Theatre - Revolutionary Girl Utena OST)

I totally bullshit my way around writing sometimes. Ha!

Ara's back was against a marble table, as she held her sword against the rapier that threatened to steal her life. She glared into the eyes of the man that pinned her down with a wicked smile on his face. His artificial left eye glowing brightly, giving him a dangerous amount of energy that pumped his heart ten fold. "You are a feisty one, daemon, I'll give you that," he said. "But, there is a limit for someone like you!"

As the power of the artificial eye became powerful, Ara had to make the choice to not hold back anymore. From the back of her neck, a small dot of ink ran over her skin, covering her in thin lines from head to toe. It reached the blade, and took over the rapier. With a single word, the weapon disintegrate into dust, forcing the man to fall back away from her before the ink could reach him.

Ara could feel her mouth water up, thanks to the nauseating feeling in the pit of her stomach, that usually happens whenever she is forced to use a large amount of ink. Her sword disappeared as she immediately tackled the man down onto the ground, and reached for the artificial eye. "This is for your own good, Eli," she growled through clenched teeth.

The bright light burned her skin, but she forced herself to dig her fingers into his socket, and pulled the eye out with a roar from both her and Eli. The light faded as the eye rolled across the floor, etched in the forgotten language. Ara struggled to get up on her feet, only to fall back down as soon as she threw up on the floor.

Eli blinked as he slowly sat up while he felt the sensitive skin under his bad eye. He turned to Ara in confusion and shock, then saw the artifact on the ground. It didn't take him long to realize what had happened, so he immediately got up to take of Ara. "I'm sorry," he muttered as he guided her to a nearby couch. "I'm sorry," he repeated, over and over, as he tended to her wounds.

She gave him a weak smile as she tried to reach out to him. "It's okay," she said. "I forgive you..."

Eli took her hand into his, and stared into her weary eyes. Despite her words, he couldn't forgive himself for his actions. "Rest," he told her as he rested her hand across her stomach. He then turned to the artifact to pick it up from the ground.

Ara watched him as he walked back to her, and placed the artifact in her hand. He didn't say anything, as he watched over her as she drift off to sleep.

Ara's eyes fluttered to the sight of a white wall. Her mind and body felt heavy and groggy, but she pulled herself together to sit up to see she was in a prison with a glass wall. She chuckled at the fact that she had once again found herself in a somewhat frightening situation.

At least they gave her a bed to rest on, but she didn't safe without her robe or her book. In fact, she started to feel anxious. Who had taken her stuff? Why was she here in this prison? What do they want with her?

And where is Axton?

The questions that ran rampant around her mind stopped, when she heard footsteps echo from down the hall. Her eyes widen when she saw Osiris stand behind the glass, wearing a lab coat. "Hello, Ara," he said, with no hint of emotion in his voice. "You have questions, no doubt, but unfortunately, I can't answer them, due to personal reasons."

Ara wanted to get up from the bed, but her legs felt oddly numb. Most likely a side effect of the gas, she thought. "You're right," she replied with a forced smile. "And I'm not surprised you don't want to answer them. But, can you at least do me a favor, and tell me if my robe and book are safe?"

Osiris inclined his head with a raised brow. "I... don't think I can."

"A simple 'yes' or 'no' is enough, Osiris."

Osiris hummed lowly as he looked around, then raised a finger up to his lips. "Yes," he replied in Rios, the language she grew up with.

Ara didn't expect him to answer her at all, especially in another language. " *Are you... telling the truth?*"

He straightened up his posture as he hid his hands behind his back. " *We find that your belongings are too important to destroy, as it may contain some important information. To say the least, I've learned quite a bit about you, Ara,*" he spoke in monotone.

Ara shuddered at the thought that someone read through her journal without her consent, and recalled the moment she met that strange daemon "Skully". " *I see...*" She laid back on the bed. " *I guess I'm stuck here, aren't I?*"

He then spoke in Elios as fluently as he spoke Rios, "We believe you have valuable information that will help us, and we would gladly give you back your freedom, if you agree. If you say nothing, or decline our offer, then you will be stuck here, until we no longer see you as a valuable asset."

Ara frowned as she ran her fingers over the white wall. "Then, you will kill me."

Osiris let out a soft grunt, as he shifted his weight from one leg to the other. "Y-yes."

Ara quickly caught on that moment of weakness, and asked, "You don't want to keep doing this, do you, Osiris?"

He cleared his throat. "I will give you some time to think it over, Ara. Once you make up your mind, call out to us, and someone will be with you. For now, I suggest for you to rest."

Ara sighed heavily. "Right..."

"Rest well," he said, before he turned away to leave.

Osiris returned to Ara's cell, to see that she was writing on the walls with the ink that ran down her index finger. She stopped mid sentence to turn to him, and gave him a smile, before resuming. "You know, I almost regret telling you certain things about me, Osiris," she said. "I tried breaking that glass there, only to learn that it's surrounded by artifacts." She finished writing with a period, then faced him with a wry smile. "It hurt, by the way. The surge of power that ran through my body."

"Then why are you still writing, Ara?" he asked.

"I was starting to feel overwhelmed, and without my journal, I need to find a way to express myself, so..." Ara spread her arms to show the writings all over the wall. "I did all this."

"But, doesn't it make you feel sick?"

Ara shook her head as she placed her hands on her hips. "No, that only happens when I have to force myself to unleash my talent." She looked up at the ceiling that has been left untouched. "If I don't do something, then I... well, I lash out. Just a natural reaction when it comes to feeling overwhelmed."

Osiris' brows furrowed. "I see... but, if you agree to help us, then no one has to worry about such a thing happening."

Ara scoffed. "Of course you'll dangle that over my head... but, you know what, sure."

Osiris was taken aback, while Ara approached the glass with an easy smile.

"Since you want to keep your secrets to yourself, I will figure things out by myself. Besides, you got a... 'friend' of mine, don't you? A red skin daemon?"

Osiris narrowed his eyes as he adjusted his glasses, which made her laugh.

"See, you don't even want to tell me, so, at this point, I might as well. I'm tired of playing these silly games, where my captor thinks he is too 'mysterious' and 'cool' to even talk." Ara huffed as she gave Osiris a look of pity. "Something that I know is not your true self... You are much more than that."

He stared hard into her dark brown eyes with pursed lips.

"And I want to help you, Osiris..."

He silently looked up to see the writing on the walls.

"All he needs is a little help," he read, "to get on that right path that I see. That man is capable of doing so much more, than this, and deserves to be happy, just like the others. If I can't save him, then fine, but, I can't sit around and do nothing, knowing that something is wrong. I don't want to see someone destroy themselves again, over what they think 'love' is."

Osiris shut his eyes tightly as he pinched the bridge of his nose. He took in a deep breath, then said, "You will have to obey our orders, Ara, from the moment you step out of that cell, and have your belongings return to you." He lowered his hand as he looked down at Ara, with a hint of sorrow behind his eyes. She nodded firmly in response. "I am sure you will be of great help to us."

"I promise you, I will do my best."

A sense of comfort and relief embraced Ara, as soon as she slipped her robe back on. Everyone was in awe by the colors that were brought to life, until they snapped out of it to return her journal. "Show me where Axton is, Dr. Clement."

Osiris hesitated to answer, but something told him that she wouldn't fully comply, unless she does see him. He gave the assistants orders to return to work, then took Ara by the shoulder to guide her to another part of the laboratory.

Ara quickly learned that it has plenty of heavily armored guards, scientists, and cleaners, working in the many long hallways. Some doors lead to different rooms and parts of the laboratory, but what caught her eye is the signs here and there. She kept note of them mentally, as she followed Osiris to the room where Axton is kept.

Her eyes widen in shock to see him lying in a cell, holding onto his injured body. "Axton!" she called out.

He lifted his head up slowly to give a weak smile. "Greetings, Ara... and Dr. Clement."

"I will send the medics here to tend to your injuries, Axton, but please, behave while they are working."

He laughed, before spitting out blood on the floor. "Ah, but I am behaving, in return for all the mistreatment you make me suffer from."

Osiris flinched, but quickly pulled himself together to speak, "I understand. It's our job to ensure daemons like you stay put."

Axton raised a brow as he glanced at Ara. "Is that what you are going to do with her?"

Ara blinked with a frown, then exchanged looks with Osiris. Various emotions played out on his face, before he pursed his lips and shook his head. "To my understanding, she is just as human as most of us here are."

Axton snorted. "What did you do, Ara, to get the special treatment?" A smile played on his face as his eyes glint with amusement. "Did you get to see if the drapes match the curtains?"

Osiris coughed uncomfortably from Axton's accusation, while Ara grinned. "Now that you say that, you got me curious, Axton." She chuckled and shrugged. "But, he isn't interested in females... are you, Osiris?"

"I never cared about one's gender," he replied, getting a look of surprise from Ara. "Besides, I'm already in a relationship."

"An unhealthy one, from what I've seen," Axton replied.

Osiris became quiet, and looked down at Ara as she pat his back. "R-right..." he continued. "Anyway, are you satisfied now, Ara, knowing your friend is still alive?"

"Yes, Osiris. Thank you." She turned to Axton with a small smile. "Please, play it safe here, Axton. I don't want to see you get hurt anymore..."

The daemon sighed as he dropped his head. He was silent for a moment, before he nodded. "Fine... but, I'm only doing this because I want to see Matt again."

Ara chewed on her lip as she approached the glass. "I want to say, 'I promise, I will get you out,' but-" "That would be a promise based on hope." Axton chuckled. "I get it. Just do what you got to do."

She gave him a firm nod in response, before she returned to Osiris' side. "Show me what I need to do, Dr. Clement."

"Very well. See you again, Axton."

Axton huffed as he waved his hand, and watched them leave the room.

As they walked down the halls, Ara's body froze from a sudden pulse urge of energy. She stared up at Osiris with wide eyes as soon as she realized what they were working on down here. "You... can't be serious...!"

Osiris said nothing as he grabbed her arm to drag her to a large door. With a slide of a card through a slot, it opened before her eyes to reveal a large slab, written in the ancient language.

At first, Ara thought it was an legitimate artifact, but the feeling that pulsed through her heart made her have seconds thoughts. She looked up at Osiris in horror. "You're... insane!"

Once the door shut behind them, he released her from his grip. Osiris gave her a sorrowful look, riddled with guilt that she could tell from the moment they made eye contact. "Why...?" she asked.

"Why not?!" another spoke up, making them both jump in surprise and fear. A man with grey streaks in his unkempt hair approached them with a wide smile. "Osiris claimed that you knew plenty about artifacts, and with your knowledge, and perhaps talent, we could make our own, using similar materials our ancestors made!"

Ara's eyes widen as she felt her hair stand on end. She never heard anyone ever attempt making something like the artifacts, but if they ever did, obviously, it must have its drawbacks. Awful ones. "Who are you?"

"Ah, I'm Dr. Gaius Blaze. Co-founder of this project, and partner of Dr. Osiris Clement." He gave Osiris a wink as he waved him forward. "Isn't that right, my love?"

Ara could see Osiris hesitate as he approached Gaius. "Yes, Gaius," he answered in monotone, "I'm glad to be working with you, to bring something wonderful into Theia."

Gaius smiled seemed genuine as he looked down at Osiris, before he yanked his arm to throw him on the ground. "Such a terrible liar you are, my dear. But, there is nothing to worry about, because, you're right! The humans will be thrilled with our special gift!"

Ara could feel rage build up within her once Osiris landed on the ground with a thud. It answered so many questions, but now a new one popped up in her head.

How will she kill Gaius?

With a wave of her hand, ink surrounded her body, and turned into various blades that pointed towards Gaius. He stared her down with a crooked grin filled with amusement. She snapped her fingers to bring the weapons down on him, but a bright light shielded him from harm.

Ara looked down to see Osiris holding onto Gaius by his ankle. From underneath his shirt, she spotted a tear drop shaped artifact that was the source of his power. She took in a deep breath as she lowered her hand. "So, this is what you want," she said.

"It's what *we* want, Ara," Osiris corrected her.

"Idiots... Neither of you understand what you are really going to bring to this world! You're the ones killing The Divines' Gift! You're going to destroy Theia!"

"No, child," Gaius spoke up, "we're going to build a new future with this." From the palm of his hand, a bolt of energy shot out, and pierced through Ara's chest, making Osiris gasp in shock.

Ara slammed onto the ground, twitching from the intense amount of pain that ran through her body, struggling to breathe. Every time she blinked, memories flashed through her mind,

starting from childhood, to the moment she left home. Snippets played in her head as she clutched her chest.

Help me, she wanted to cry out. *Someone, save me.*

Gaius chuckled as he watched Ara struggle, while Osiris slowly got up with his jaw dropped. He turned to Gaius with tears in his eyes, and grabbed him by his coat. "Let her go!" he yelled. "We need her!"

"If she is strong enough, she will live, Osiris," Gaius replied, as he ran his hand over Osiris cheeks. "You must understand, my dear," he said so lovingly, "that if people truly want to help us, we have to push them to their breaking point... or else... they will never obey."

A sudden realization hit Osiris. He let go of Gaius as he turned back to Ara. This is what she wanted to save him from, something that he'd thought was only to be a temporary thing. Osiris had hoped that, when they're done, their lives would had been wonderful, just as Gaius had promised.

But, he should had known that Gaius had went in too deep, into the fantasy of power and control.

Osiris wanted to save Ara, but stopped when he felt Gaius' hands on his shoulders. Fear seized him, straight to his core, even though he wanted to put a stop to this immediately.

His heart skipped a beat when Ara laid completely still.

Gaius huffed as he let go of Osiris. "I thought she would be able to withstand that... Pity." He snapped his fingers to the other scientists around them, to pick up the body. "Burn it."

The scientist gathered around her to pick her up, but were pushed back by a pulse of energy. Osiris' eyes widen in shock. She had an artifact this whole time, he thought.

What he also didn't expect to see was Ara get back on her feet.

However, she wasn't the same as before, when she straightened herself up, and revealed a pair of horns on the sides of her head. Ara herself seemed confused as he was, when she raised her hands up to poke them, but then groaned in disgust. "Really?" she muttered, as she turned to Gaius. "You just tried to kill me."

Gaius' lips parted in a wide grin. "A daemon! You're a daemon!"

"Half!" she yelled. "Half-daemon." Ara sighed as she pulled her hand into her coat, but was interrupted when Gaius unleashed another bolt of energy, only to miss when she leapt to the side. She stared at him with a raised brow and a spear in her clawed hand.

There were no need for words, she thought, before she bolted towards him to slash him across the chest, causing some blood to spill on the white floor. Osiris stepped back in fear, once he saw Ara up close.

Her eyes had this shimmering glow to them, turning her usually dark brown irises into amber. Ara looked pale, but he couldn't tell if that is normal, or a side effect from nearly being killed. Her horns curled in different directions, and could poke a person's eye out if they are not careful.

He couldn't believe she is a half-daemon.

Gaius broke the spear in half, turning it back into ink, then lunged forward to grab Ara by the throat. She quickly backed away from him, and leapt towards Osiris to wrap her arms around his neck. "You could do so much better than this, Osiris," she said, before she dragged him with her to the nearest terminal.

Gaius growled as he threw another bolt towards them, only for it to explode on impact from Osiris' shield. Osiris groaned in pain as he held his wrist, but he sucked in a deep breath to type away at the terminal, knowing full well what Ara wanted from him. She gave him a reassuring smile, exposing her sharp teeth, before she reached into her robe again to pull out an artifact.

She pulled it close to her chest, and for a moment, it felt as if the world had stopped.

"Eli..." she whispered. "Please, help me..."

The artifact rumbled in her hand, before a rapier appeared in her hand, and the orb hovered over her right eye. This will kill her if she doesn't take care of Gaius fast, she thought.

But something in the back of her mind reassured her that everything will be alright. A very familiar sense of warmth spread through her body, and she could see a hand take a hold of hers.

"I promise to protect you," a voice whispered. "Let's us put a stop to this together, Ara."

Thank you, Eli, she thought, before she rushed towards Gaius. With another slash, blood splattered, but to Ara's surprise, she could see something hidden behind his clothes. Gaius made no effort to block her attacks to reveal a large orb imbedded into his chest, catching Osiris' eyes.

He wanted to shout at the top of his lungs, but he bit his tongue and brought his attention back on the terminal, despite the amount of scientists that tried to fight through the barrier.

Ara growled as she backed away from Gaius. "You made yourself one, for an occasion such as this..."

"Indeed, I have... I was promised power, as long as I made it myself... It took me so long... but Osiris... oh, my sweet Osiris... he brought me the answer."

"Promised'...?"

Gaius snort. "Doesn't matter. Seeing that you seem so determined to fight against the idea, I think it's better to kill you... Everything will fall back into place after your death."

Ara snarled at Gaius. She was starting to lose her vision in her right eye, but she grit her teeth to attack Gaius with the rapier. He took on every attack, only for his wounds to heal within seconds.

Ara knew she won't last for much longer, but she will be damned if she didn't kill Gaius before Death takes her.

If she has a limit, he has one too, fake or not.

But, if he truly built it himself, then this could mean that he doesn't have a limit, she thought.

A moment of hesitation was enough for Gaius to punch her across the face, knocking the artifact over her eye on the ground. Osiris yelled out her name, while Gaius reached down to pick up the artifact with a wide smile. He brought it up to his lips to absorb it into his body, but the moment he opened his mouth, the small artifact formed into a rapier, and pierced through his throat.

Everyone in the room stood completely still, as they saw Gaius choke on his own blood, once the rapier disappeared. He shut it, hoping that the artificial artifact in his chest would heal him, but it didn't. In fact, it left a gaping hole as it freed itself from his body, and landed on the ground with a thud.

Osiris couldn't tear his eyes away from him, as he collapsed as well, right beside Ara.

It took him a moment to recollect himself, and shout at the scientists to shut down the project, and put both Ara and Gaius somewhere safe, as well as the artifacts.

"I still have a long way to go, I believe," Eli said, as he sorted out the mess on his table. "I've studied as much as I could here, but I should take your advice and travel."

Ara looked down at her once injured hand, now healed back as if nothing has happened. "It's up to you, Eli," she replied. "Theia is a big world, filled with wonder and beauty. You will certainly learn many new things, if you want to."

Eli chuckled as he turned to her. "I would like that..." He paused as he glanced at her hand. "You..." He sucked in a deep breath, before he continued, "you should keep that artifact safe, Ara. It has my soul tied to it, so if you ever need help, just call out to me, and I will be there... in some way."

"Like a ghost?" she asked with a smile. "How terrifying."

Eli mocked laugh, while she giggled.

"Anyway, I promise to keep it safe... but, you know, I don't mind having a companion with me. It can be kind of lonely out there, you know?"

Eli noticed Ara's blushing cheeks, one that he couldn't help but mirror with a sheepish smile. He sighed as he turned away from her. "I think it's better if we go our separate ways, Ara. I

can't forgive myself for causing you harm, so..."

Ara hummed thoughtfully as she inclined her head. "I understand. But, you know how to contact me, don't you?"

"Of course." He picked up a pen, along with a small notebook that had a small green gem embedded in the center of the leather cover. "I am truly grateful that you let me study your journal, to create this. I may not be a writer, so I don't have your abilities to bring things to life, but I quite like that we can communicate this way, thanks to a touch of your magic. Your father must have been an intelligent man to be able to create that book of yours."

Ara smiled as she raised her hand up to her robe. "It was thanks to my mom's knowledge of magic, being a daemon, and my dad's intelligence with material things, to be able to build. Anything is possible, if you have an open mind."

Eli smirked as he tucked his pen and journal into his coat. "But, being too open minded can lead to disastrous results."

Ara shook her head with a smile still on her face. "No, what you did was stupid, Eli. If you continued to use that artifact for much longer, you would have given in to its influence."

"These artifacts aren't sentient creatures."

"No, they are objects, but with powerful influence over the human mind, and are dangerous weapons to use against daemons."

"Which leads to so many questions about them..."

"Yes... too many... Anyway, enough talk, I want some hot chocolate."

Eli snorted. "All right, all right, Ara, I shall make some for us."

Ara groaned in pain as she woke up. When she opened her eye, she shot up to place her hand over her blinded one, only to feel a gauze secured in place.

"Don't take that off, Ara," a familiar voice spoke up.

"E-Eli?!" she called out, as she turned to see a pink haired man with a puzzled look.

"I... think you used up too much energy," Osiris said, as he dug his hand into his pocket. He looked disheveled with bags under his red puffy eyes.

It took Ara a moment to realize what had happened, but she wasn't sure how Gaius died, until Osiris explained to her that the artificial artifact decided he wasn't worthy anymore. The artifact she possessed made that clear, when it pierced his throat.

To her surprise, he had the artifact, and gave it back to her. "You should rest, Ara. I promise I will tell you more when we have finished sorting things out."

She stared at Osiris for a moment, then nodded her head. "You... you should get some sleep too, Osiris. What had happened... had been taxing on both of us."

"Y-yes... I will." He turned to the door from her blind spot. "I hope you rest well, Ara."

"Same to you."

The Final Tale of Sol City

Chapter Notes

Been struggling a lot with writing these days, but I've wanted to finish this story, and wrap up some loose ends as best as I could, so voila~. I may have overlooked some important information, sorry, but if there are any questions I might have missed, I may explore that in the future, depending on what happens. Anyway, I'm glad I'm done, for now.

Sorry for any mistakes. heh

A few days had passed by since the incident. Axton reunited with Matt, and spoke about plans of their future together, but something bothered Ara.

"Is it really impossible to save The Divines' Gift?" she asked Axton.

She remembered the way his eyes carried sorrow as his shoulders dropped. "That slab caused too much damage, and even if my kind were to gather to save it, it would be too late by then." He showed Ara a root of the tree, wrapped around in leaves. As she placed her fingers over it, she could barely feel a hint of life in it. "We can replant it, but it can't be done in Sol City. Daemons already made their lives here, with the humans." Axton wrapped the root, before tucking it into a small pouch. "But, I will find a good place for it, somewhere in Theia."

Ara nodded her head slowly. "Okay... I'm sure there is a good place for that root... I wonder what sort of name you will give it."

Axton snort. "This one will have no name, Ara, like most trees. I prefer it that way."

"That's fair." She gave them both a small smile. "I wish I could have done more."

"You saved Axton, Ara," Matt spoke up, as he embraced him in a hug. "That's all that matters."

The way they both looked at each other with stars in their eyes made her giggle, shortly before she grew silent as she remembered Osiris. "I have to check on someone... I wish you both luck. Thank you for your hospitality." Ara gave them money in exchange for their help, then left them to find Osiris.

The laboratory was located underground in Tibou, right beneath The Divines' Gift. The path was made out of tunnels that were made by man long ago, possibly for shelter, or some other

use, until they found peace above ground. From what Osiris told her, the laboratory was made over the years, up until now.

The reason for its existence was to torture and study daemons, which is why there are so many cells there now. Not only did the idea of that disgust Ara, but it made Osiris sick as well, but he was forced to work on the project, since Gaius was the one who decided to make it happen.

To build their own relics, based on the artifacts, especially the one Osiris possessed.

However, with Gaius' death, the project has been brought to a halt. Osiris hoped that this would mean that the mayor would have second thoughts, but there hasn't been any news as far as Ara knows.

It didn't take long for Ara to find Osiris in the now empty laboratory. He stood in the room where the slab is, and where Gaius' body laid. "Osiris?" she called out, tearing his attention away from his thoughts.

"Ah... Hello, Ara." He gave her a forced smile, even though she knew how much pain he must be in. "I assume you came by for more information."

"Actually, I came to check on you," she said as she stood beside him. "But... I already know the answer to that..."

Osiris let out a heavy sigh. "The mayor hasn't even spoken to me about what they want to do yet. I think they actually want to continue this project, even though I have no desire to even stay in this damned city."

"Are they forcing you to stay, Osiris?"

He shut his eyes tightly with a scowl. "I believe so..." he growled between clenched teeth.

Ara wasn't sure what to say, as she thumbed the artifact in her pocket with pursed lips. She eyed the slab for a moment, then within the blink of an eye, a figure covered in smoke appeared before them.

She gasped in fright when she noticed the thick cloud surrounded them. "Skully...?"

Osiris opened his eyes and jumped from the unexpected guest. "What?!" he shouted.

Before he could say anything, Ara stepped forward. "What are you doing here?" she asked with a frown.

Skully sucked in the smoke from his pipe, then answered, "I'm here, for this, Miss 'Writer'," as he rose the pipe towards the slab. "It's very impressive, even if it was made by a couple of ignorant humans."

Osiris blinked, but said nothing as he shrunk back, while Ara snapped. "Such a thing doesn't belong to you, Skully! It should be destroyed, like any other artifact!"

"Such a bold statement, from a hypocrite." Skully chuckled. "I've seen you used that artifact in your pocket... in fact, I saw everything that happened in this very room."

Ara shuddered at the thought of being stalked. "How and why?!" she screamed.

With a wave of his hand, a piece of paper flew out of Ara's robe, to land between his fingers. He turned it over to reveal it was the letter he left behind on the train. Ara growled as she stomped her bare feet on the ground. "You spied on me!?"

"Yes, I did, only because you have caught my interest, Miss Writer. You even put yourself at risk for saving a man you don't know, and would had died, if it wasn't for the fact you are a half-daemon. By the way, I'm keeping your horns, since you hate them so much, you'd prefer to break them off."

Ara was ready to attack Skully, only to be paralyzed by the smoke, once it slipped into her nose. She coughed harshly as she fell back, covering her face. Osiris looked between them, unsure what to say as he approached Ara to pat her back.

For a brief moment, Osiris thought he saw Gaius stand where Skully is. He held Ara tightly as he said, "You're the 'Boogeyman'..."

Skully burst out into laughter. "Now, *that* is a name I haven't heard in a long time!"

"Don't you usually appear after a war, to collect the bodies?" Osiris asked. "Is that your real reason for being here?"

"Oh, not exactly. I've already visited the man you once 'loved' at the morgue, to collect the relic in his body, and here I am, collecting this one too." Skully placed a hand on the slab, where the smoke gathered, from the bottom to the top.

Osiris watched in shock as it disappeared before his eyes. He stared at Skully both in disbelief and awe. "W-wait! You... took... Gaius'...?"

Skully gave him a affirm nod. "You should be grateful, Dr. Clement. Things have turned out differently for you this time, so not only you are alive, but you are free! Go, and leave this city, before they catch on to what's going on down here... Here, let me give you both a push." Skully extended his hand, but before Osiris could argue, he snapped his fingers.

Ara woke up abruptly with a cough, that made Osiris jump from his slumber. A heavy weight laid on his shoulders as he slowly came to, then looked around to see they were in a small room. He looked to Ara as she struggled to breathe, and noticed smoke puffing out from her mouth.

"It... wasn't a dream," he whispered in a daze. He then shield his eyes when a ray of sun hit his face. He quickly got up to feel for the window, and clicked the safety to pull them up to

let the wind in.

It helped Ara breathe again, but she felt too exhausted to get up. She cursed under her breath as she laid on the couch. "What... the hell?" she muttered.

"Are you okay?" Osiris asked as he knelt beside her.

She gave him a look, before she huffed, "I'm not... Are we on a train?"

"I... believe so." Osiris looked outside the window to see the large, open land in the distance. A sight he didn't believe he would ever see here in Ellos. "Beautiful..."

Ara noticed the way his azure eyes shimmered from the sun's light. A small smile crept on her, before she checked herself for injuries, and missing belongings. Fortunately, everything was where it was, and no signs of blood either. She then rested her hands beneath her head, and stared up at the ceiling of the cabin. "What does that man think he is..." she whispered.

Osiris turned to her with a raised brow, until he remembered that he was speaking to a supposed fairy tale. "A monster, supposedly," he replied, as he took his seat. "Are you familiar with the story of the 'Walking Nightmare'?"

Ara remembered some books about it, but she never cared to read them. "Not really..."

Osiris looked down at himself, just realizing he was wearing his lab coat. With a grin, he took it off as he said, "You called him 'Skully', but to me, he is known as the 'Boogeyman'. A creature that eats any children that is awake past midnight. A common folklore around Bijou, but not in many other countries. He was originally a myth; nothing more than a story to tell children to not misbehave, but I've learned that he is more than that, thanks to history books."

"Really? What is he then?"

"No one knows for sure, if he is an arch-daemon, or some other being. There has been lots of studies of him, many carrying different stories about the 'Boogeyman', however, there is one thing that often appears in books: he appears to collect the bodies of the dead."

"Huh..." She gave Osiris a curious look. "You seem passionate about these sorts of things... why?"

Osiris rolled up the coat into a ball, to lay his head on. "My father is the reason why. He was an archaeologist, and an adventurer. He traveled to all sorts of countries around Theia for years, until he met my mother in a far away land. Since he felt it was about time to settle down, he returned to Bijou with my mother, and had me." His lips curled into a soft smile as memories surfaced. "My father then became a teacher, and my mother was a kind hearted woman who fought for what was right, for both daemons and humans... I've learned what I could from them over the years, until I graduated and left Bijou."

Ara noticed the heavy feeling in the air between them. "But, things didn't work out like you'd imagine..." she said.

"Unfortunately..." Osiris cleared his throat, and took off his glasses to set them aside. "I left, hoping for adventure, like my father, but instead, I got myself... stuck, when I fell in love with the man I thought was a good man. Everything was fine, until he learned about this..." He pulled out the artifact around his neck. "I didn't mean for it to happen... It was an accident... I thought this thing didn't have any power, but we both learned it did, from a... car accident."

Ara frowned. "Oh, wow... Was it fatal?"

"Fortunately, no one was hurt, especially the cat."

"Ah... But, didn't he know the risks?"

"Oh, yes, he did, but that obviously didn't stop him. He claimed he was promised something better, if he achieved his goal... I wasn't sure what to do, until I found myself working alongside him, on our own runes and relics."

"Which is why you want out, didn't you?"

Osiris blinked as he remembered the number of times he stood at the train station. He turned to her with a small smile, while his eyes watered up. "Y-yes... I wanted to escape... but... it was impossible..."

"Well, here you are now, Osiris," she said as she waved her hand around to show off the cabin.

Osiris paused as he turned to the ceiling. He fought to try to hold the tears back, but couldn't.

Through clenched teeth, he cried out for Gaius, which didn't surprise Ara. She slowly got up to take off her robe, and drape it over Osiris. He blinked the tears out of his eyes as he looked down at the once colorful robe, that turned white as snow.

"Don't reject it, Os," Ara said as she took off her glasses before she laid back down. "Let it embrace you..."

Osiris took in a deep breath to calm himself down, and as he exhaled out slowly, the colors came back. He felt a comforting warmth that surrounded his body, bringing memories of his mother to the surface of his mind.

He slowly looked towards Ara as she laid back down on the seat opposite from him. "If I may ask, why did you hide the truth from me?"

She stared straight into his eyes with a smirk. "About me being a half-daemon? Simple, no one has to know." Ara let out a heavy sigh as she shut her eyes. "I've suffered through a lot of discrimination for what I am, since my birth. Hell, I even hate that side of myself, and never want to think about fully embracing that side, but... well... you've already seen it for yourself."

"I... think I can understand," Osiris muttered. "I am human... after all... And..." He continued to sputter into mumbles, which made Ara laugh.

“Well, at least, you don’t seem to hate me for what I am.”

For a brief moment, the memory of Ara killing Gaius flashed before his eyes. He took in another deep breath, as he held onto his necklace for comfort. “Where... did you get that artifact, Ara?”

“From a friend I’d helped,” she replied, not realizing his pain. “He is a good friend.”

“I see.”

“Why are you asking me all these questions, if you have read my journal, Osiris?”

“Ah, well, I have not actually read through everything, because that book of yours seems endless. I only skimmed through it, to find some details that I needed to look for, and even read about your time in The Drifting City.” He paused. “I’m sorry, by the way, about what happened.”

Ara flinched, but then shook her head to dismiss the thought. “I can’t lie; I feel guilty for being helpless, but it was out of my power. Those angels are something else, let me tell you that.” She gave a brief chuckle.

“You haven’t given up your search, though, right? For that angel, Horatius?”

Ara held her tongue as she thought about it. “I think I have an idea about where he is, but Diso is too far. The only thing I can do, is travel and hope that our paths cross again.”

“Do you ever think about finding a temple to pray to?”

“As a half blood? Don’t know if the angels will even hear me.” At that moment, an idea came to her head, and in excitement she jumped up, only to crash onto the ground with a thud. Osiris looked down at her in worry, until she sprang up to his face with a wide smile. “But, I now have an idea, thanks to you! God, why didn’t I realize this before?!” she squealed.

“Pardon me?”

“We are going to Rios, Osiris! We are going back to my island, to the temple that is built there! Tell me, do you speak Rios?”

He raised a brow at her as he recalled speaking to her fluently in Sol City. “Yes... Why?”

“Ah, right, yes you do, because, you spoke to me, never mind!” Ara started to laugh out of excitement. “As long as you have me by your side, Osiris, I will show you the beauty of Rios, and my village! Ah, you will love it!”

Osiris wasn’t sure where this sudden spike of energy came from, but Ara’s laughter was infectious enough to bring a smile to his face. “I will hold you onto that, Ara. Maybe, I will learn some new things from you.”

“And I from you! So! You got me curious about a few things, Osiris.” She plopped down on the chair with a smile. “How many languages do you speak?”

“At least seven, thanks to my parents, and my education.”

“Oh, that’s cool!”

“How many do you speak?” he asked.

“One, actually. The reason why I can speak Ellos is thanks to my talent, writing. It took me a long time to actually make it work, but with a little bit of passion and practice, I succeeded. The thing is, about being talented, is that, anyone can hone a talent, be it writing, art, or anything really, as long as you hold a deep sense of love for it, and lots of patience. I... have to admit, there is still room for growth for me, but, I’m proud of myself, to be able to make things happen, with a sentence or a word.”

Osiris blinked, then dug into his pocket to pull out a piece of paper. Ara immediately recognized that it was the paper she gave him, after their conversation at the theater. A brief chuckle escaped from him as he passed it to her. “I should have accepted your help earlier, Ara... My apologies.”

She shook her head as she tore the paper apart. “It was your choice to make, Os. I’m just glad that, that is over now. Just... rest, okay? We have a long trip ahead of us.”

“I will. Thank you.” He then adjusted the robe over his body, as he laid his head down on the pillow.

Ara watched over him as he drifted off to sleep, then looked out the window of the cabin. She couldn’t see her home from here, but the land that spread far beyond her sight made her heart flutter in excitement. “I’m coming home, *mama* ,” she whispered to the wind.

The First Step

Considering that their trip to Rios is going to take at least a few weeks by train, thanks to the constant stops and long hours, Ara began to jot down notes in her journal. Money would be a problem, since she will need to save up more than usual for the both of them, but maybe Osiris has some money on him. That would definitely help them both, but money isn't meant to last, she thought.

"Pardon me, Ara, but are you all right?" Osiris asked, grabbing her attention for a brief moment.

"Ah... Y-yeah," she forced out a laugh. "I was just doing some calculations... I'm very used to taking care of myself, but I will have to change my plans a bit to help make you comfortable." She paused as she scratched her head with her pen. "That is... if you really wish to travel with me."

He gave her a quizzical look. "Given how things turned out in Sol City, I don't believe I have much of a choice, except follow you."

"That's the thing..." she sighed. "I assume that what had happened still bothers you... and suddenly being forced out of your comfort zone to travel with a stranger is... odd, no doubt. I mean... I did... kill... your ex, too... so..."

Osiris took in a deep breath as he leaned back into the seat and stared up at the ceiling of their cabin. "I... have to admit," he started. "It feels... overwhelming to suddenly be thrown out into the wild, so to speak. But... I don't really want to complain about it. Everything that has happened to me was out of my power, and now... I prefer to take this chance to start something new."

"But, don't you have any complaints?"

A laugh escaped from him, before he mumbled something in another language, and cleared his throat. "I have quite a few, but... I suppose I'll just have to wait and see how things will turn out. Besides, even though we don't know much about each other, I have read your journal and came to understand that you do know what you are doing, so I shall place my trust in you. I also think it will be interesting to explore Theia with someone that isn't my ex..."

The two stared at each other quietly, until Ara nodded her head firmly while placing her journal down on her lap. "If that's what you want, then I'll do my best to make sure that you are comfortable through our travels. Rios is quite far, so it's best if we take it little by little, or else we will both be burnt out. And... if there is anything you want to talk to me about... feel free to do so, okay? I really want to... hear you out. It's been a while since... I last traveled with anyone."

Osiris ran his fingers through his light pink hair with a small smile. "Thank you, Ara. I shall keep that in mind..."

Despite how calm he seems to be, Ara could tell that something is wrong. There is no doubt that he is bothered by what happened in Sol City, and she wishes there was a way she could talk to him about it, but it seems that now isn't the time. Osiris will need it to let things sink in, and when he is ready to talk, he will, she believed.

Tickets, Please!

“Are you okay, my love?”

Osiris' eyes fluttered open to meet a familiar pair that hovered over him. It took him a second to realize who the speaker was. “Gaius...?” he whispered as he reached out to him.

Gaius let out a sigh before he extended out his own hand, to grab Osiris and yank him off from the ground with such force it made him yelp in pain. “You let me die,” he growled.

“Die...?” Osiris repeated, then it hit him. “No... wait...!”

Within the blink of an eye, a blade pierced through Gaius' throat, stopping only an inch away from Osiris' nose, then disappeared in a flash while blood flowed down from the wound. Osiris tried to back away, but was stopped by Gaius as he held him tightly by the arms.

“Where are you going, dear?” Gaius asked softly. “Don't you want to be with me? Come on, we got work to do.”

“W-wait,” Osiris sputtered as he struggled to be freed, “you're hurting me!”

“You'd also hurt me!” Gaius roared.

“But I didn't mean to!”

“Yes, you did! Accept it, *dear* !”

“N-no...!” Osiris squealed, unable to say much else.

Knowing he was powerless against him, Gaius wrapped his arms around Osiris and buried his face into his neck. He whispered something into his ear that Osiris couldn't hear, then pushed him back into the pitch black water that was under their feet.

A swirl of emotions overwhelmed Osiris, until he noticed he couldn't breathe. He tried to reach out for Gaius to save him, but he only watched as the water got into his nostrils and mouth. Why, Osiris thought. Why isn't he doing anything?

Perhaps it was best to accept his fate. Perhaps he should die.

It might be for the best.

He then shut his eyes as the water filled his lungs.

The unpleasant sound of seagulls squawking stirred Osiris. Even though it hurt, he opened his eyes to a bright cloudless sky.

It was strange, but not an unwelcoming sight.

As well as the hum of a woman's voice.

Wait, a woman?

Osiris sat up to see that he was on a beach covered by tropical plants with red-green fruits growing on them. There was also a small tower, which was rather odd.

The strangest thing, however, was the woman standing at the edge of the black ocean. Before he could say a single word, he saw something slowly rise up from the waters. A giant with curled horns on the side of its head which resemble a sharp toothed canine. Its eyes glimmered like amber in sunlight, but Osiris was quick to notice there was no sun.

Where is he, he wondered.

“My home,” the woman replied.

From the horizon, a bright light flashed, engulfing the giant along with Osiris and the woman.

Ara's sudden sneeze woke Osiris up with a jolt.

He looked around to see that they were still in a cabin on a train, which meant that what he saw was only a dream. A very vivid one.

As he took in a deep breath, Osiris leaned back into the seat while pinching the bridge of his nose with a scowl.

“Nightmare?” Ara asked as she wiped her nose with the sleeve of her robe.

Osiris cleared his throat before he answered, “I... am not sure. It felt too real, honestly.”

She gave a brief laugh. “Ah, yeah, I know what you're going through. You're probably stressed out from being on this train for too long. Well, good news is that we're stopping at another city soon, so we can get off there to get some proper sleep at a hotel or something... Thing is, I don't have enough cash for it... and... Um...” Ara then mumbled something in a barely audible whisper.

“Pardon?” Osiris asked with a raised brow.

“Well... uh...” Ara forced out a laugh, avoiding Osiris' eyes. “You see... We... um... We need to... find a way to sneak... out of the train. I mean, we did come on board without tickets, and I don't seem to have any on me, so here comes some... possible problems for us. If we get caught, we might be kicked out immediately, and possibly banned from trains, and go back to our respected countries. Like, you might have to go back to Bijou, if not Sol City... while I, on the other hand, have to deal with Rios' government about my actions here in Elios. I've dealt with their militia before... They are not fun loving people, nor do they approve of daemons if they happen to cause trouble.”

The deafening silence between them weighed heavily on Ara's shoulders. The expressions that flashed across Osiris' face were louder than anything he could possibly say, making her even more uncomfortable.

“But...” she continued, “there are a few ways we can get off board without much trouble. We just need a bit of luck. You see, I could forge us some tickets. I'm very familiar with how official tickets are supposed to look, but the thing is, we need to make sure the person that checks us overlooks it, whether they mean to, or not. But, we still will get into deep, deep trouble if they know that it is a fake. Some people tend to have very sharp eyes about forged items.”

“Right,” Osiris huffed. “Is there anyway you could also just... make us invisible?”

“I can't exactly do it for both of us... but... it isn't impossible. Just requires a lot of ink... and paper.”

“Are there any drawbacks to doing that?”

“For you, no. For me, yes.” Ara sighed as she pulled out her journal from her robe. “If I use too much ink, I get sick and weak. All you need to do is simply take a shower to wash the writing off, or just spill something on yourself...”

“I see. Very well, then. I will trust you with making the forgeries.”

Her eyes widened from surprise. “Are you sure...?”

“Yes, I'm sure.” Osiris' lips widened as he gave her a firm nod. “You have far more experience than I do, after all.”

Ara pursed her lips while holding her book close to her chest. “Th-thanks...” she said barely above a whisper. “All right then... I'll start working on the forgeries... I really don't like doing them, to be honest, but I just want you to be okay, Osiris. If things play out like I hope, then we can continue our trip... If you wish, that is.”

“If I wish?” Osiris repeated.

“Uh... Never mind.” Once she pulled out a pen from her journal, Ara flipped to the last page to begin her work on making the tickets.

The sight and sound of paper after paper being torn out to make different tickets was a sight to see for Osiris. He never met anyone who used their talents up close before, nor that spark of passion that gleamed in Ara's eyes. It was a stark contrast to what he was so used to back in Sol City, when he was working with the other scientists.

He could recall how apathetic and drained they had become over time working on that blasted rune. Even when he talked to them, he could hear how weary they were from the tone

of their voices. The only times they ever smiled, was at the end of their shift, when it was time to be freed from that soul-sucking job.

The only person that he could recall having a burning desire to see it through, however, was Gaius.

Osiris flinched as he felt a sudden sharp pain in his arm.

Something in the back of his mind started to surface, but the sound of a thump snared his attention away.

Ara had collapsed on the seat, with two tickets in her hand. She turned to him with a weak smile on her flushed face. "I... did it..." she said, while trying to swallow her saliva.

Osiris cursed under his breath as he reached for the young woman to pick her up. Ara tried to force out a laugh, but this wasn't funny to him.

Without a second thought, he opened the cabin door to pull Ara out and search for help, unfortunately, he had bumped into someone, dropping her. In a state of panic, he tried to get Ara back up, while also helping the stranger.

"Stop," they snapped at him. "Calm down, sir."

With Ara in his arms again, Osiris looked up to see that it was a pale woman with long silver hair and bright pink eyes.

"Is something the matter?" they asked him.

"Oh, ah... Oui!" he answered hastily. "Cette femme est malade! Aidez nous s'il vous plaît!"

The woman looks down at Ara, noticing that she does look rather ill. "I will fetch something for her. Go inside your cabin and wait for me to come back. I should not take long."

"Merci!"

Just like the woman said, she had returned to the cabin with a bottle of water, slices of fruits, and cookies.

Happy to see the tray of snacks before her, Ara wasted no time to nibble into the fruits, that seemed rather familiar to Osiris. Are those mangoes, he wondered.

"Thank you, Miss," Ara said to the woman. "I'm sorry for causing trouble."

"I am just glad to do what I can to help," she said with a smile. "Oh, and you had dropped your tickets, by the way."

Ara's breath hitched as she watched the woman pull out the papers from her pockets.

“It seems that someone has forgotten to stamp them,” she sighed as she looked them over.

Ara looked over to Osiris with narrowed eyes, while he tried to act calm, even though it was obvious he was struggling to keep his facade, much like her.

Before Ara could say anything in her defense, the woman pocketed the tickets. “But, this isn't the first time something like this happens... I can't fault the passengers, considering that some people tend to fail at their jobs.” She shrugged as she turned away. “Bloody useless people...” she mumbled as she shut the door behind her.

Osiris let out a sigh of relief as he slumped into his chair.

Ara however kept her eyes on the door with a hard stare. “I don't believe that woman is an actual attendant...”

“Huh?”

“She knew they were forged tickets,” Ara continued. “But, she let us go... Something fishy is going on, and I don't like it one bit... We are going to get off on the next stop immediately, okay?”

There was no room for disagreements, Osiris noticed from her posture and tone. “Very well...” he replied firmly.

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