

NO MORE HEROES

Being the First Part of The Curseborn Saga

FOUR LORDS

NO MORE HEROES

Being the First Part of the Curseborn Saga

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*This book is dedicated to all the great artists of
the past, To all the young artists of the future,
And to all who wish to save the world, By first
changing themselves. ~ Four Lords*

*I dedicate this story to my Penny.
The world would be free of strife and blindness,
If only they had the chance to see it through your eyes.
If only for a moment. A single, beautiful moment.
~ Bodhi J.M.S. Ryder*

*To my family, my alpha and my omega.
Without you, there is nothing.
~ Simon Gatsu Sandoval*

*To my mother,
She is the reason I am,
And she is the one who gave me the strength
to follow my dream.
~ Squall D. Ace*

*I dedicate this to my brother,
an uncompromisingly honest soul
seeking the light of grace in a dark world.
From you I learned freedom of will
and undeviating steadiness of purpose.
We did it.
DING
~ Elnath D. Shanks*





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Foreword – Of The Sorians

To those who gaze up at the stars in wonder, and to those who are willing to set forth on this dangerous adventure, there are a few things that would be good to know, in the hope of simplifying the transition from your world, to theirs.

Far away from Earth, in a protected place, there exists a solar system known as the Aethir Ring. The Aethir Ring is the oldest and most primeval solar system of our Universe, and it is home to seven elemental Gods. In an attempt to frame perspective, take a moment and imagine Olympus, home to the Greek Gods of myth. If one were to view Olympus as the realm of Gods who look over Earth, then one could reasonably view the Aethir Ring as the realm of Gods who look over the Universe.

Seven worlds exist within the Aethir Ring, and each world is home to one of seven Gods. Two of these Gods, Life and Death, stand above the other five as they were the first to be. The other five Gods each represent one of the following elements; Earth, Wind, Fire, Water, and Lightning.

Lady Vale, the Goddess of Life, lives on a world named Aeryx. It is here the setting of this legend takes place. High in the skies of Aeryx float two beautiful skylands, each the size of a small country,

and connected by a single monolithic bridge where the lands are closest to one another. The name of this place in the sky, is Soria.

Soria is home to a unique guardian race of people known as Sorians. Since near the beginning of time, the Sorians have been the barrier between threat and the Goddess of Life, living only to protect her who protects all else. It is the Sorians whom are held dearest to the heart of Lady Vale, and they have protected her for many eons.

There are many different stories for who the Sorians are, and where they came from. For one thing, it should be noted that this race of warriors are Demi-Gods. Their lineage is ancient, going back nearly to EIEN itself, the destruction and creation of all things. Some believe that after the Gods first opened their eyes, the second race born after them were two Dragons who chase one another across the Universe eternally, and thus became known as Night and Day. The Sorians are the ancestors of Night and Day, and the blood of the Dragons flows proudly through their veins. But they are also the children of the Gods, and thus is the reason they walk in the form of the immortals.

The Sorians have a unique life force, which is commonly referred to as Aura. It is the energy that lives dormant in their souls, and something that they have learned to tap into and utilize over the eons they have been guardians. It is the source of their power, and the reason they are strong enough to fight on par with the Gods. Aura can be manifested and used in thousands of different ways.

Another interesting trait of the Sorians is that they are immortal in the sense that they cannot be killed by Time, a fact that has hideously upset the three sisters of Past, Present and Future for an eternity. But although they cannot be killed by Time, a mortal wound can and will kill them. They are not indestructible.

Because of their immortality, the Sorians live on a far different time frame. What some would consider a year on Earth would be called a ring on Soria. However, a ring is a tiny amount of time to a Sorian, as their equivalent of a year would be about the equivalent of our century. Therefore, the equivalent of a sixteen-year-old human would be roughly a 1600-year-old Sorian, or a Sorian who has been alive for sixteen cycles. Lastly, and on a smaller level, a Sorian will refer to an hour of time as a shade.

In regard to physicality, all Sorians have a strange, bone-like armor that grows out of their skin, much like an exoskeleton, in a way that is unique to each and every Sorian. This bone armor is known as Hollow.

There are other characteristics, of course, that show how Sorians resemble those of their bloodline. For starters, their eyes have a vertical pupil, exactly like those of their dragon ancestors. You will find that some Sorians more resemble Dragons, while others will more resemble the Gods. For example, you may encounter a Sorian with horned ears and patches of scales, but you may also encounter one with fair and beautiful skin, and only the presence of the most delicate, striking and elegantly placed Hollow would confirm their dragon lineage.

When the Sorians first came to be, their Hollow was snow-colored, flawless, and pure. Together, they were the most beautiful beings in existence; a race unified and constant, with one burning purpose: to protect the ever-protecting Goddess of Life.

However, the world of Soria was changed drastically upon the birth of the Curse. No one knows how or why it came to be, and its origin is still very much an enigma. After the Curse was born, the Hollow of many Sorians began fading to black. As more and more time passed, the once-whole and spirited world did not seem as one anymore, and those that were different, those who bore the mark of the dark, came to be known as the Curseborn.

The unified lands of Soria changed to Risia, land of the Pureborn; and Falia, land of the Curseborn. The bridge that connected the two skylands became less and less of a bridge, and more and more of a wall between those who had been tainted, and those who had not.

This story takes place in the 7th age of Soria, nearly 200 cycles after the birth of the Curse . . .



Prologue – A Mother’s Farewell

Age of 619X

A young woman ran desperately through the dark trees of Neverend Forest, her breathing heavy and her feet bloodied. She moved like a blur in the night, her long white dress ripped and tattered. On her back she wore a large leather sack, and slung over her shoulder was a wooden longbow. If she had not been running in fear of her life, and if the wind of the night had softened, one might have been able to hear the sound of faint crying from within her rucksack. But not tonight. Not in that moment. The only thing one would hear was the sound of many soldiers pursuing her, forcing an inescapable plight upon the woman that would ultimately mean her death.

Fear ran through her bones as exhaustion sunk in. Her hands tightened on the straps of the rucksack, her fingers clenching so hard she could feel her nails digging into her palms. Pain tore at her like a lunatic with a cleaver, yet every time she felt she could go no further, every moment she nearly lost hope, the sound of crying rekindled her spirit. And so, her hands clenched tighter, and she did not stop.

“You will live. I promise.” Her words were a whisper left amongst the trees.

The rain was falling like the pounding of her heart, but she

could not hear it. She could no longer hear the sound of her naked feet slapping through icy puddles. Even the shouts of the soldiers chasing her seemed to fade away with each passing moment. She knew she would soon reach the Edge. It was there that death would find her.

“We tried . . . the best we could. I just wish . . .” As she spoke her voice seemed to fade away into the dark where it would keep her words forever. The last and only remnants of her would be a trail of blood on the forest floor.

Droplets of water ran down her face, and she could no longer tell if it were the rain or her tears. Her eyes glanced down to a crimson bandana that was wrapped around her wrist, and her foot suddenly caught one of the snake-like roots hidden so well in the dark. Turning on pure instinct and grasping the sack to her chest, she felt her back slam into one of the roots. It felt as if she were falling onto solid stone. Pain wailed through her but she felt nothing. The agony of her waning body was like her words before the storm, they were there, but could not be heard. The tempest of the sky raged with the emotional strife of her heart, deadening everything else in its presence.

Despite the ever-approaching soldiers, she could only smile as her gaze found the eyes of two baby boys. Pushing away all doubts and fears, she stood to her feet and fastened the rucksack to her back. A fire unlike any other fueled her that night; the love of a mother.

Willing herself one leaden foot at a time, she ran on, pushing through the boundaries of the impossible, but she was slowing. Her body was desecrated by cuts and bruises. She could smell her own blood, the loss of it sapping her consciousness. She could hear the sound of an arrow whistling through the air behind her. Without hesitation, she moved the sack out of harm's way, feeling the silver-tipped barb pierce into her shoulder.

She wanted to cry. She wanted to scream and wither away. She wanted to give up. But she did not. Without even bothering to touch the arrow in her shoulder, she turned and ran again into the darkness. There was no right way to run anymore. There was only the fear of watching her children murdered before her eyes.

Seconds passed in the mirage of hours, and she soon felt herself break free of the forest, her feet slipping as she emerged over a runout of sharp rocks. One of the rocks slit open the bottom of

her foot from her toes to her heel, and she screamed. Tumbling and cutting her hands, the fall saved her from a second arrow that whistled past her ear. Stumbling to her feet, she found herself standing not far from the edge of a salient cliff. There was nothing beyond it, and nothing below it. Only dark, starless sky. The cold wind of night felt like death's touch upon her cheek.

High above, the clouds parted, bringing a calm to the sky and the rain. Taking a deep breath, she slowly limped forward to the tip of the cliff. Running had only prolonged the inevitable fate cast down upon her. She knew from the beginning how her story would end. Pulling the sack carefully off her back, she placed it on the ground and stared into the eyes of her two sons.

"My boys," she began, her voice calm and warm. Despite the blood pooling into a thick puddle at her feet, she could not help but smile as she looked at them. They were the very essence of her love. One of the boys was calm and smiling, his eyes shining. He had bright silver hair and eyes blue enough to paint the sky.

"Caim," she said, the name itself giving her the feeling of courage. She ran her fingers through his hair, then pulled two silver chains out of her pocket. With still, yet bloodied hands, she fastened one chain around his neck.

The other boy was crying loudly, his hands clenched into tiny fists. It was almost as if he could feel his mother's suffering. He had black hair, dark as a moonless night, the same color as his mother's. A drip of blood fell on the boy's cheek and he opened his eyes, revealing a fearful green stare.

"Storm," she whispered, and she could feel the softness of his heart from within his eyes. She took the other chain and attached it around his neck, then ran her fingers through his hair.

"A memento of your father," she whispered.

Despite everything, she would not cry. Not in the face of her children, who were still too innocent to understand the severity of their situation. She merely smiled warmly, unable to take her eyes off of theirs. Storm began to calm down, and reached out at his mother with his little hand.

She could not help but laugh. No one knows how long this moment lasted for her, but it has been spoken that just before you die, time slows. She watched in awe as the falling rain slowed to a crawl, as if someone had paused the world around her, giving her an eternal last moment with her sons. She kneeled down further,

rubbing her nose against their soft cheeks.

“Caim . . . Storm . . .” she began, sitting up. They both looked up at her as if she were the sun herself. “I know we haven’t been with each other very long, but I feel as if I’ve known you a lifetime. I know that I’ve put you through a lot already, but I want each of you to promise me something.” She sniffled, trying as hard as she could to hold back her tears.

“If there is one thing I will regret in my life; it is that I won’t be able to watch you two grow up. I won’t be able to see you pick up your first sword, or speak your first word, or meet your first girl. Throughout your life, you will have to make many mistakes in order to learn, and sometimes this will be difficult and frustrating, but always remember that the clever can learn from the mistakes of others.” Caim’s little hand fell on Storm’s as they listened.

“Make sure you eat lots and lots of food, because if your appetite is anything like your fathers, you’ll be needing your strength.” She cracked a smile. “Always remember that it is the simple things in life we must appreciate. Brilliance lies in simplicity, at least that’s what my father always told me. Make sure to get as much sleep as you can . . . I know you two will be needing it. And don’t be afraid to make friends, good ones, even if it’s just a few that will look out for you as you look out for them.”

She wiped her bloody fingers on her dress before softly poking Storm in the stomach. She could feel his strength as he grabbed the tip of her finger. Turning to Caim, she poked him on the forehead and watched him smile. One of the slow falling raindrops touched down on his cheek.

She could hear the sound of the soldiers getting closer. She could feel their footsteps through the earth she kneeled upon. But more so than anything, she could sense the vengeful presence that was leading them to her. She turned to look at an opening in the trees, staring through them and into the darkness, watching, waiting.

A dozen soldiers with bows on their backs moved swiftly through the rain and the dark. Creatures tucked away into their little holes as they swept past. They weren’t trying to move quietly, or in any way mask their presence. Their pitch-black armor caught the light of the moon, and a single flash of lightning illuminated the faces of the soldiers. They were all young women. Strong, silent, and fueled by one binding purpose.

One of the soldiers came to a stop, her eyes entranced by

something before her. She reached out, holding up her palm as a leaf floated down from a tree. The more she stared at the falling leaf, the more she could not understand what was happening. It was falling as if in slow motion, it's subtle shifting sway slowed to the speed of a crawl, and it took nearly two full breaths to fall only a few inches and land on her palm.

A hand fell on her shoulder, awakening her from the trance. She turned to look at their leader, a young, beautiful woman with long silver hair and a single black eyepatch over her left eye. She was the only one without a bow, and a dark longsword hung from her hip.

"Come, Arya," said the leader in a soft but commanding tone.

"Something beyond us is here with the girl," whispered Arya. She looked up at the sky, then at the forest surrounding them. The other soldiers had all come to a stop as well, each of their eyes captured by the slow falling of the leaves around them. Even the rain had become nearly still. A shiver ran throughout Arya's body.

"Whether there is something here with her or not," said the leader, stepping forward. She came to a stop, then turned and faced the soldiers who cast their gaze upon her. "She will still die."

It wasn't long before the soldiers passed out of the last lining of trees and onto the cold, sharp rock of the cliff. The falling of the rain had returned to normal, and an icy breeze swept past their faces as they encountered the one they had been hunting. Each of them pulled their bows off their shoulders and nocked their arrows, staring down the sights at their one, helpless mark.

A shift in the clouds cast a single ray of moonlight down upon the cliff, illuminating a teary-eyed girl with her hands clasped together, and her two sons, who stared up into the light as if it were the embrace of their own mother. And then it was gone. The clouds passed in front of the moon once again, and the shadows of the future were all that remained.

"Young Rose," The lady's voice snapped open the girl's eyes. She rested her hand on the pommel of her longsword and continued. "You are hereby accused of treason for willingly and knowingly breaking the Law of Blood. You will have no trial, and have been sentenced to a hasty execution."

Rose unclasped her hands and stood up with her back facing the soldiers, the wind lifting her long hair out behind her. She cast one last, longing look up at the moon.

"You pray meaninglessly," the voice of the lady behind her declared. "After your death, the two Half-bloods will be killed. There will be no pardon. There will be no trial. They will not exist, as they should have never existed in the first place."

"You will not lay a finger on them," Rose's voice cut through the air like a whip. She could hear the bowstrings tense within the hands of the soldiers. Judging from the sound, she could tell that there were many archers standing alongside the one leading them.

"She is but a Curseborn girl and yet you flinch upon hearing her voice?" The woman leading the soldiers asked her own troupe. Rose could hear the amusement in her tone. It was the voice of someone who enjoyed the torment of others.

Rose turned around, her eyes radiating her steadfast will. "You would do well not to underestimate me." Before her stood a dozen soldiers, poised to kill. Out in front of them all stood the lady in command. She wore elegant black armor smeared with blood. A simple patch covered one of her green eyes, and beautiful silver hair fell down the length of her back.

"Lady Scylla," Rose said, not hiding her surprise. She took a deep breath as she took in the sight of their world's most famous heroine. "I suppose I should be honored, but I just can't help but feel otherwise. It's a shame, I've always looked up to you."

Scylla let a grin curl her lips. "Honored? I am but a soldier, and you are a traitor. I am here to make sure you are the first and last person to ever break one of the great laws. You have twelve arrows aimed at your heart, Rose. You deserve to die. You said it yourself in your attempt to sway the will of Lady Vale." The moonlight shifted, revealing a smear of blood through Scylla's hair.

"Don't lie to me," Rose said through clenched teeth. "You loved him. This is personal."

Scylla met Rose's gaze with a look of deep disdain.

"He told me about you," Rose said, tightening her fist. "You killed him . . . didn't you?" She asked. There was a fragileness in Rose's heart that echoed into her voice, as if with each word, she took a step further out onto a frozen lake, and with each step, the ice cracked and shifted under her weight.

"It is you who killed him," Scylla answered sharply. "Although I may have his blood on my hands, it is you who sent him to the executioner. You should have left him alone. You should have known your place."

Rose felt a smile tug at her as she spoke of him. “You should know better than anyone that there is no one in the world who could have told him what to do. I only loved him, and I will never feel regret because of that.”

“Yes,” said Scylla, “it was his choice. He chose to betray his country, he chose to walk the path of revolution where only one possible fate awaited. Never forget, there are two types of people in this world. There are those to whom fate smiles, and there are those to whom fate condemns.”

“That may be so,” Rose answered, looking down at her sons. “But they will walk a different path. I will leave this world knowing that you cannot hurt them. The light of Vale has shined upon them.”

Scylla smirked. “Has it now? It is the Lady Vale herself who condones each and every Great Law. You are delusional from loss of blood and fear of death. Do you think they will survive this night and escape the judgement of Soria unscathed? Their fate will be the same as yours, and their deaths will be painful, that I promise you. I will make sure you watch those Half-bloods die, so you can exist soullessly in an eternity of regret as your penance. That, my dear Rose, is the only thing you will leave this world with.”

Rose carefully pulled her wooden bow off her shoulder, stepping in front of her boys. The soldiers tensed once again, but the leader raised her hand, steadying them. “I’m afraid you’re wrong,” Rose said. “They are the first of their kind. They have the spirit of the old, and the blood of the new. It is they who will restore this world to its former glory. It is their chosen path. It cannot be avoided. I have seen it.”

Rose’s eyes were soft as she looked down at Caim and Storm. Each of them were crying quietly, for despite their lack of understanding, they could sense the distress in the voice of their mother.

“I have heard enough,” Scylla said, her patience dwindled.

Yet, Rose was not listening. She was not thinking. She was merely being, taking in the final moment between her and her sons. She gave them one last smile before reaching up to her hair and pulling out one long black strand. Focusing her thoughts, little crystals of energy materialized around her forearm and over her hands. Her energy twisted over the single black hair, changing it into a long black arrow.

Rose nocked the arrow to her bow and pointed it at Scylla's eye. "You may be stronger than me in every single way. You may have me outnumbered and completely outclassed. But you underestimate the strength of my will. It is a strength you will never know. The unconditional love between a mother and her children is the most powerful force there is. It has the power to sway gods, change fate, and never die. It is because of that love that you have no power to harm my sons."

As Rose was speaking, she did not notice the cracking of the cliff's edge around her feet.

"Farewell my sons, and know this, your father and I will always love you."

As she stood before the soldiers, her inner desire to protect her children manifested itself in the form of energy, blossoming forth from her body. Several of the soldier's eyes widened at the sight, for it was unlike anything they had ever seen. The aura of Rose's resolve lifted up and around her, guarding her, until it flowed off her shoulders like a cloak of light and flame.

The crack of the cliff accelerated and ran around Rose's feet to the other side. She could feel the ground beneath her becoming unstable, but she did nothing. She only stared back at Lady Scylla, releasing her arrow at the same time the soldiers released their own.

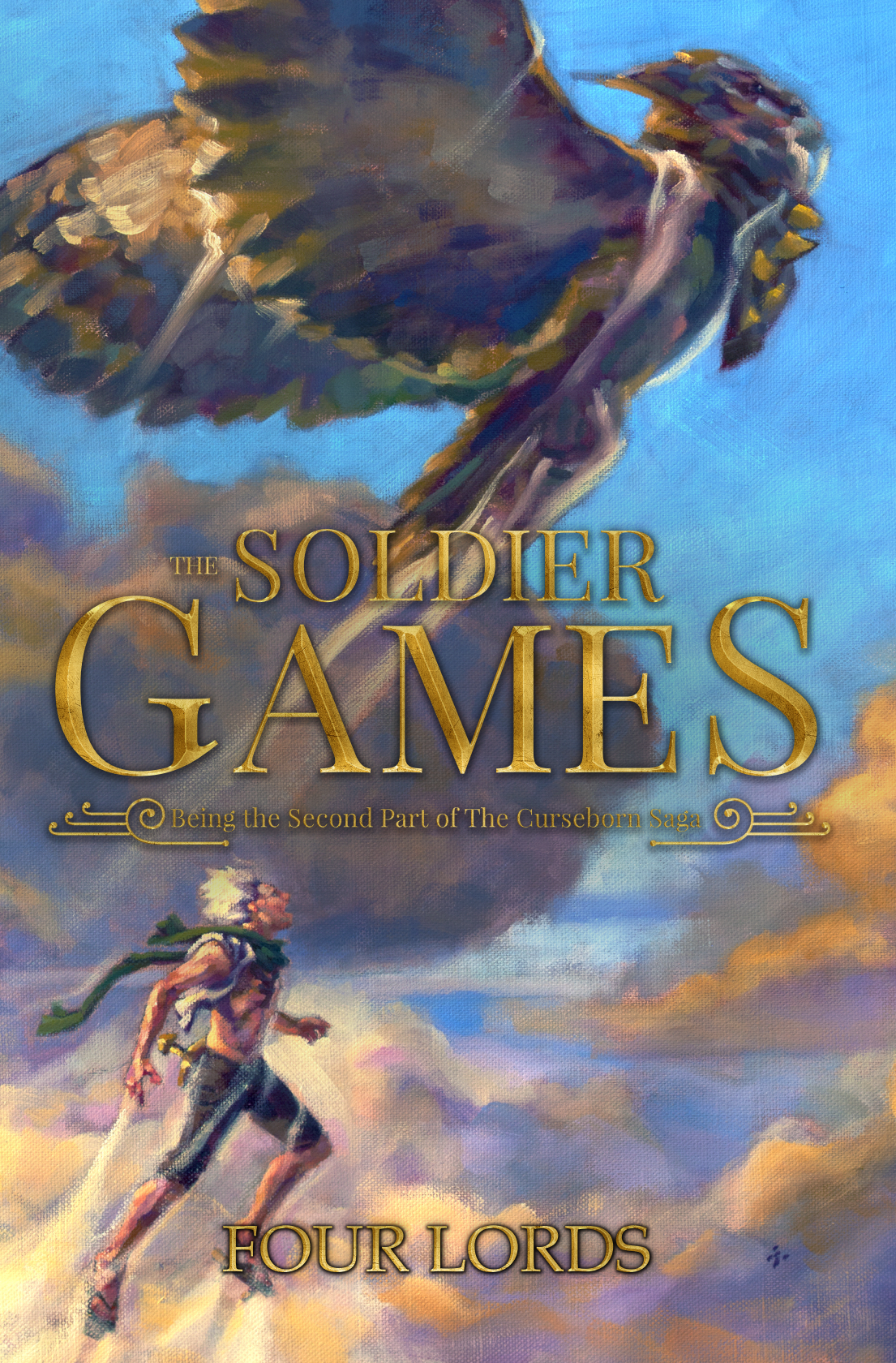
Rose's arrow shot forth like a spear of flame, tearing through the air and scarring the ground in its wake. As it did, she turned and lifted her arms out, protecting her sons as a dozen arrows struck her in the back. She felt each and every arrow shot by the soldiers' pierce into her body one by one. Blood pooled into her mouth as she continued gazing at her sons with nothing but love expressed on her face.

Rose felt the edge of the cliff lose stability as the crack grew deeper and wider, and she knew it wouldn't hold out much longer. The boys looked back up at her, their eyes blank and unsure. She felt her body collapse, her once white dress stained red with blood. But she did not stop smiling. Her vision blurred, and the voices of the soldiers seemed to be fading further and further away. Even with her eyes closing, she could see their little hands, reaching for her. And just before she opened her mouth to say their names, the tip of the cliff collapsed, and the three of them fell deep into the night.

Lady Scylla walked forward to the edge of the cliff, looking out from the floating land in the sky. Along her cheek was a deep, blood trickling gash, an unforgettable memento from the one person she most wanted to forget. The simple eyepatch had been ripped off by the arrow, revealing her hidden eye; black-rimmed and ghostlike, with a pale light in the iris that glowed like flames burning at the end of a dim corridor. She looked down for a long while before her face twisted into a grin. The fall would be long and dark, perhaps even endless. No one knew what rested beneath the lands of Soria. To them, it was only darkness, and always would be.



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