

Market Day

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The streets were filled to the brim with vendors desperately in need of a profit. Heat pounded hard, breaking sanity and composure of even the strongest. Bald sweaty heads glistened in the heat of the day, revealing a delicate glistening sheen.

“VHALLA!”

I whipped my head around to find Fritz sprinting toward me, his lean body begging for food. His gold flecked eyes held a desperate measure as he tripped on a loose piece of brick and fell face first into the area before my feet. I gasped in appall and closed my eyes. There he lay, a man in a boy's body. At this point I have no shame standing next to his tall lanky frame. As long as I can remember Fritz and I were always close. Not a day went by without Fritz pushing and prodding his way through my daily life.

He looked up at me from where he lay, a smirk settled on his face at my concern. He jumped up with one swift motion and dusted himself off. Fritz stood about two feet taller than me. He hadn't always been that tall. One year he shot up like a sprout and simply never was the same. I tilted my head up and shaded my eyes.

“What?” I said as flatly as I could.

He paused for a moment before uttering, “Boss needs you”

I debated spitting out a snarky comment about his clumsiness, but the look of urgency in his eyes told me to hold my tongue.

Together we ran through the streets dodging vendors, carts and roaming animals.

We panted through our words as we arrived.

“Yes boss?”

“How are you feeling, Vhalla?” Gray, our boss, a short stout man with peppered hair and a stubbled chin whispered.

“Just fine, why? Do I need to do another....?”

Gray looked down ashamed, “Yes, we don't have much time. Come quick.” He flitted off, his white coat brushing behind him as he went, expecting us to follow. We hushed and followed at his heels.

Through a window a young man lay on a metal table in the lab room. His skin sagged and his eyes sunk. His body gave off a dim glow in the damp lighting.

“We have another one, Vhalla.” He sighed, looked at Fritz and motioned for him to stay as he pulled on a white hazmat suit. “It's okay buddy we got it.” He patted him on the back and we walked away, leaving his slumped outline behind.

Although Fritz had grown up in this life, he had never understood the meaning of death. Some think it's from being so innocently minded, but I think it might have to do with dealing with his Fathers death. For all we know he's a closed book.

We rushed through the door, careful not to leak too much contaminated air. Gray pulled out his journal and read off his written prompt, “ Man, 23 years of age. Dropped off last night anonymously. Rough condition. Exposed to radiation approximately 24 hours ago.” He looked up sympathetically, “That's all we know.” With that he left me to it, patting my shoulder as he went.

“Let's do this.” I prepared myself, closing my eyes, deep breaths. “You're gonna be okay Vhalla” I murmured to myself. My routines are almost ritualistic. Same thing day in and day out.

I settled my fingers on his temples. Closing my eyes I channelled all my energy. The air left the room and together we are alone in a room existing only of emptiness and quiet. My fingers tingle as my magic flowed into his body, surrounding him in a gold glow. His skin appeared to reshape, tightening around his skinny frame. I pulled away gently as we came back to reality. My ears rang as I stepped back and leaned against the cooled wall for support. My skin itched in irritation and everything seems to heat. Blackness.

I woke up in the break room, blinding lights overhead. Fritz was passed out next to me. Routine I said. His arms clung tightly to me like a lost boy. I'm all he has. He's all I have.

The next morning, we walked to the mine together. Streets were bustling as early as 4 in the morning. Farmers set up fresh produce, women washing clothes and men loading wagons. The mine is about a three mile walk out of town. Night shift is on their way out as we arrived, still dark, the sun only starting to wake. We nod our hello's as they exit the opening to the dark abyss.

Our eyes adjusted to the darkness in a matter of seconds. Two tracks were swallowed by the darkness. The occasional rattle and clang kept the workers alert and present. Any mistake could mean one's life.

Together we walked to the hooks lining the wall and grabbed a helmet, light and air ventilator each. Fumes and dust from the rocks and minerals were toxic and carried through the tunnel breezes at fast rates. We both split up and settled into our work.

When the air became heavy with night we met up and began the long walk home. Smoke and dust covered the moon, preventing any illumination to guide our way. Tomorrow would be the same. It always is.

Routine.