

Pierneef Skryfkompetisie

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May 2022

Fate

At the beginning of time there were two beings, one good and one evil, who both complimented each other perfectly. Soulmates. Their bond caused destruction throughout the heavens as their natures did not fit into the natural order of the world. To save creation the Lord God sentenced them to death, however he was touched by their plight and so gave them hope. He granted them five different lifetimes each, in which, if their bond was strong enough, they would find each other.

During the first lifetime she was a queen, he was her second love, and they were two of the most powerful people in the ancient world. At first, she had had no interest in him and had conceived a child with his mentor, yet when the child's father was assassinated, his prodigy rose to power, and it was as if she saw him properly for the first time. His name was Mark Anthony and he belonged to her. She guided him along the treacherous footpath of politics and he in turn secured her a foothold in Rome. With him on the Triumvirate and her on the throne of Egypt, they were the ultimate ancient power couple. She watched him now with ink-coloured eyes as he sat reading a text on war strategy, a privilege after the Great Library of Alexandria going up in flames, during which many tomes of coveted knowledge had been lost. She turned back to her reflection in the mirror and thought Anthony blessed by the Gods to have a queen such as she by his side. Anthony stood up, briefly kissed her, and bowed before exiting her chambers. Gone to quell the rising contentions, in Rome and in Alexandria where rebellious murmurings had begun to rise. She gestured to her maid servant to draw her a bath and cast all worries from her mind as it simply wouldn't do to have stress lines on her brow. Time passed and history began. The news spread through the people like wildfire. *Mark Anthony is dead. Mark Anthony has killed himself.* Most frightening of all, *the Romans are coming to take Alexandria.* The Queen sat on the floor of the temple, deserted by her lover, and stared at the jar within her hand, a jar full of figs and something deadly. She smiled proudly to herself as her maid's footsteps faded and she slid her hand into the jar. Cleopatra, the last Queen of Egypt, did not cry out as the snake bit her and the last look on her face was one of triumph. The Romans would take Egypt, but they would not take her.

In the next lifetime he watched as she stood on the platform, her long hair billowing like a black raven's wing in the wind. That hair...part of the reason she was waiting to die. He remembered meeting her in the woods when they were children, the hours long playtime, giggling in the cupboard while filling their cheeks with stolen pie. Everyone in Salem had thought their pairing strange, Him, the sweet child who had perfect manners, the perfect little angel, and her, the dark willful swan, prone to tantrums and impossible to control. As they grew up, he had taken his place as a gentleman in society, whilst she had stayed secluded, far above the lustful eyes of the men in the street. That was when the rumors had started, whispers about her unnatural temper, her black hair, obsidian eyes, and her superior behavior. They had shrugged it off and laughed at the naivety of the villagers. Until the Witch Trials started. Suddenly the mutterings became as sharp as knives and tongues as forked and wicked as those of a snake. They had watched their neighbours fall one by one to fear as the church rose like a terrifying wall around their homes, pinning them in. He had tried to protect her to the best of his ability, but once the priest had Margaret in his crosshairs, she was a dead woman walking. He had cried when he'd seen the state of her ransacked house and again after finding the body of her chubby calico cat, who had spent many hours purring in his lap. He appealed her case and begged the court to rethink their decision, however Margaret's pride had been her undoing after spitting on her guards and cursing her prosecutors in the Devil's name. Now, there she stood, one of Hell's finest angels, surveying the crowd with derision. Her dark eyes locked on to his and he could almost see a golden thread connecting them to each other, she closed her eyes.

Margaret bowed her elegant head, bidding him farewell. A tear landed on the tip of his boot, and he realized he was crying. The executioner rested a gloved hand on Margaret's wrist and bade her climb atop the barrel in front of her, below the shape of the noose. She did so, a queen ascending the stairs to heaven. The jeers and howls of the crowd grew more frenzied in Thomas's ears, akin to the baying of bloodhounds. The noise swelled to a deafening crescendo as the barrel was kicked out from beneath her feet. He stared, mesmerized as she twisted, a spider on the end of its web, her face eventually relaxing as the grim reaper kissed her forehead and guided her away. Thomas spent the next couple of years in a trancelike state. It was as if he was reliving his and Margaret's life together and he himself was already dead and dreaming. The residents of Salem avoided his now shabby house, where the air seemed filled with an unnamable heaviness. He drew sketches of Margaret as a heavenly spirit, a being of wind and chaos, and tried to sell them at the markets. He became more of an outcast than Margaret ever was, until he too was eventually accused of consorting with the devil and put to death. His thoughts, even as the curtains closed over his icy eyes, were always and forever about Margaret.

"Do you like it?" They stood together in their third lifetime, the chapel ceiling stretching up above. Alex was at a loss for words as he gazed at the most beautiful work of art he had ever seen in his life. Mi looked at him, somewhat nervous about his reaction. "I wanted to show you something," Mi grabbed Alex's hand and together they ascended the scaffolding to the platform on top, where Mi's paints and brushes were still scattered. They stared up at the artwork more beautiful than any that had graced the world before. It seemed almost as if the artist had had a personal view of the heavens and recreated them with a brush. Mi angled his head towards a section of the glorious painting and Alex gaped, his dark eyes filled with wonder. Mi had painted an angel boy, white wings emerging from his back as he soared in pantomimed flight, his face set in mischievous grin. "Is that..." Michelangelo grinned at him, "Now, your beauty can be admired by everyone until the end of time." Alex stood, speechless. Mi remained by his side for a few more moments before awkwardly clearing his throat, "I'm sorry, but I can't spend much more time with you, you know that..." Alex bristled, the content mood instantly vanished, and tension soured the air between them. "What? You must run home to your wife?" Mi went on the defensive, his eyebrows arched, and he took a step backwards, his light ocean eyes darkening. "I don't have a wife. Vittoria is just a dear friend." Alex snorted with derision, "Of course. Everyone writes their friends about 300 poems," he nodded sarcastically, "It must be only natural." Michelangelo turned his back on Alex and began climbing down, irritation evident on his tight expression and whitened knuckles. It drove him insane when Alex became this person, driven by jealousy and spite although rarely a day went by without the other man having these poisonous moods. He loved him, but sometimes Alex loved him back too much. Alex watched as Mi left from atop the scaffolding, his mouth twisted with bitterness and his perfect face became, for a moment, hideous. For the next couple of years, the fire between them still crackled and danced, yet they slowly drifted apart as Alex's personality became evermore tainted. However, when Michelangelo's extreme affection for Italian nobleman, Tommaso Dei Cavalieri became apparent, and he, not Alex, became the object of Mi's artistic expression, it became the last straw. Alex, heart full of thorns, left the continent and died alone, his only company a framed drawing of his once-upon-a-time love.

In the fourth lifetime Daya curled her lips in disgust as he blew her a kiss from where he stood on the field in his rugby uniform, their school's first game after the Covid pandemic, sweat dripping off his brow. Mila leaned closer to her and whispered in her ear, "Look at him," she nodded her blonde curls in Jared's general direction, "Have you ever seen anything less attractive? That poor boy really needs to figure out that he is not as hot as he thinks he is. Also," she wrinkled her freckled nose, "he really needs to stop thinking he has a chance with you." Daya curled her glossed lips into a smirk.

Her dark eyes glinted, and she twirled her braids around her manicured fingers. She suddenly straightened and shoved Mila away from her as she noticed Michaela and her other, more popular friends approaching, Grade Eight students parting like the red sea around them. Michaela walked up to her, her short blue school skirt barely covering her flawless thighs and her equally dolled-up cronies gathered around their queen bee. "Why are you sitting with her?" Mila seemed to shrink under the weight of all the eyes on her and she pushed her cat-eye shaped glasses up, closer to her light eyes, and clutched her journal closer self-consciously. Michaela's eyes roved from Mia's oversized Pink Floyd T-shirt, baggy jeans and beat up Soviets before resting on the other girl's precious diary. Daya had to resist the urge to jump up as Mila's coveted book was ripped from her hands and held high in the air as her short friend desperately jumped, trying to retrieve it. Daya knew she should do something, anything, but she didn't. She only followed the popular crowd as they made their way to the bathroom and closed the door so they could smoke in private where the teachers couldn't see. Of course, Mila's diary was published online. Soon enough the whole school and about three others knew all the poor girl's darkest secrets, biggest hopes, and darkest fears. Life became a living nightmare, people whispered about her in the hall's, in the bathrooms and at lunch. The male students thought that reading her diary made her easy prey and their personal property. Darya had once sat in class as a male teacher discussed Mila's first bra fitting in front of the entire class, and she had almost been sick. Days went past and the teasing got worse and worse. Then came the day when Michaela found out that Darya did in fact not live in a mansion, nor get her brow regularly waxed, and suddenly she was also reduced to junk status. Alone, Darya suddenly felt isolated and out of place and made the decision to approach the person she had so badly betrayed. Mila would not speak to her at first, it became a pattern, Darya would text her, call her and try to talk to her at school and was met with stony silence. Darya had a terrible idea, maybe revenge could muster a smile, she sent the headmaster an anonymous note telling him when Michaela and her minions would be smoking and where. They were caught like flies in a spider's web. Of course, her name was brought up and she too was brought in for a disciplinary intervention. They were all expelled. She stayed up all night searching her bedroom until she found the sparkly friendship bracelet she had made for Mia when they were younger, but she had been too shy to give to her. That next morning, she cornered the other girl by the stairs and gave her the bracelet. "You don't have to keep it, just, only throw it away when I can't see you do it." Mia gave her a quizzical glance whilst the purple beads, her favorite colour, dangled from her fingertips. Darya took a breath and scuffed her shoes against the linoleum floor, "I'm sorry for leaving you." She hugged her oldest friend tightly, breathing in her candy smell, "Don't forget me." She turned, it felt as if she were leaving a part of her home behind as the doors swung shut behind her.

In their last lifetime she hid as the building shook. Another bomb falling upon her shattered homeland. She could hear voices coming, footsteps, many of them. Russians. Her hand curled around her shotgun, and she pulled it closer, in the same way she imagined her baby brother was now clinging onto his teddy bear as he crossed the border and escaped into Poland. *Liev*, she thought, *I love you, stay alive. Please.* She crawled slowly towards the gaping hole in the building's skeleton and cautiously peered outwards. Her eyes moved slowly over the wreckage of their lives and over the blackened remains of her fellow Ukrainians. She scanned her surroundings like a hawk and her stomach tightened as she saw a swarm of black ants moving her way, arms at the ready. She slowly stood up and carefully skirted around the lone wall of a convenience store before finding herself in an alleyway, filled with dust and stinking, fly-infested garbage. The Red Army soldier looked up as she froze like a deer caught in the headlights. They both stared at each other, dark eyes upon light. He was young, a child soldier. One who had probably killed several of her old neighbours. The boy did not look antagonistic however and began moving towards her, hands stretched out.

It was as if he were approaching a wounded animal. He edged towards her as a soldier shouted something from nearby and his face suddenly drained of all colour and became as white as a bone. He started sprinting towards her, his footfalls echoing like gunshots in the eerie silence. Her hands lifted of their own accord, and she shot him twice, once in the stomach and another in his shoulder. The soldier stumbled and slowly fell to his knees, an almost incredulous look upon his face. In another day, year, life, it might have been funny, but not here, not now. As his crimson lifeblood watered the debris scattered around them, Lena thought there was something almost familiar about him, and his dark, greyish eyes. A whooshing sound disrupted her thoughts and she instinctively recognized it. A tearful laugh almost escaped her lips as she realized that the boy, she had just killed had been trying to warn her, to save her life, and in return, she had taken his. She remembered her teachers telling them at school that their laziness would kill them, and as she leant back against the wall of a collapsing building and waited, she thought with irony that they would be right in the end. She felt the heat as the bomb detonated and her last thought was that if she saw the grey-eyed boy in the afterlife, she would apologize for being the reason he died.

When their time had run out, the Lord God, spared the two beings not a morsel of mercy, and they were separated from each other for all eternity. The darker side of the twin flames was sent down into the torturous bowels of the Earth, entombed by fire and black stars whilst the purer soul was lifted into the heavens and placed upon a cloud. Thus, creating an impossible divide between the beings that could only be bridged when heaven fell out of the sky and hell rose from beneath the Earth.