

### The Oasis

The people of the Oasis were gentle. Wherever the sun would graze their skin, they would glow. Their understanding of nature was vast and it existed in their culture; before every meal they'd thank the tree, crop or beast that fed them, and after every sunrise they would work on the land in front of them. Their sturdy hands pulling the weeds through the slop of watery mud, and their feet, so rooted in the ground that it was as if they were the trees themselves.

While the healthy and strong tended to the land, their elderly kept to the people. They dedicated themselves to healing and medicine. Because the Oasis was such a fertile paradise, the some of the elderly had become such good healers, that it was rumored they were granted a longer life by the gods.

At exactly this moment, a healer by the name of Madrid was bowed over in the main palace, praying for a solution. The royal twins had just been born, it instilled a current of excitement throughout the city. Elders were stirring, and the strong were wiping their hands clean of remaining silt. Women were gathered in the courtyard, whispering excitedly to one another as they admired the gifts for the twins; woven headlei's of poppy and hyacinth, some were carrying dresses and trousers embellished with a golden overlay. and one little boy who looked like he was just old enough to attend such a royal ceremony had a pair of tiny golden crowns wrapped in white silk, tucked neatly in a tan wicker basket. He was chosen as the crown-bearer.

The bad news hadn't yet reached the people amassing in the grand courtyard, for the elder who was praying just within the castle walls, did not have the courage to tell her people that the twins were still-born. The King and Queen, their sleeves still damp with their own tears, sat on their bed cradling both baby girls. Their eyes and noses red and puffy from the sorrow and their voices croaked as they called out to their Patron in a desperate cry. What happened next, even the King and Queen of such a prosperous city weren't prepared for the consequences they initiated. The only thing on their minds were saving their daughters.

Bask was her name. The Patron of the Oasis. The goddess of the sun. A force of pure, destructive energy, and she was called down to a spot in the middle of the royal families bed-chamber. A hot gust of energy exploded into the room, bouncing off of any

reflective surface it could find. Already the King and Queen knew they had made a mistake, for the feeling that emulated throughout the room made their hair stand on-end, and their stomachs turn. It was a feeling of power that no mortal had felt before, and had it been unleashed, would turn even the calmest of creatures rabid.

But the royal couple had asked Bask to help them save their daughters, and because the people of the Oasis understood the delicate balance between man and nature, the goddess agreed to help them. One by one, she sacrificed a little bit of herself to both daughters, and with the last wave of hot energy, Bask was gone. In her place, the King and Queen stiffened as both their daughters blinked their eyes open. Bright circles of yellow light shone from the babies iris's, but the parents quickly relaxed when the babies started to cry. Madrid toppled on to her back when she heard them, and with an exclamation, she scurried from the bedroom door and burst open the gates of the palace to the people waiting outside.

"The princesses!" The elder cried to the amassing Oasae, "They await your welcome!" As if in one consecutive movement, the people raised their hands in exhilaration, sunlight bouncing off their skin in patterns of gold and warm amber. Despite the magnificence of the scene in front of her, Madrid couldn't shake what she had seen peering from behind the bedroom door. A ball of white light, emanating a wave of beautiful and destructive heat throughout the room. Yet, what made Madrid shudder were the eyes, twin balls of golden light; unnatural and absent.

The Earth was already on it's fifth stage of the Post-Modern Era, a time where the soil no longer took to the ground, no plants could grow and no moisture was able to seep into the Earth the way it was supposed to. Earth's atmosphere was being held together by gravity alone. The Oasis was the only place on the entire Earth where life was sustained. Fifteen years later, the twins grew up, they were taught to dedicate their life to their people and Patron. Thea, the older, had a stern and serious heart, and even at the age fifteen she stopped finding joy in butterflies and other small creatures. Instead, she thought she could learn to help her people by healing them. She spent most of her time with the elders, huddled up in groups within the healers temple, learning about the human body and soul. If Thea took anything away from her medicinal studies, it was

that while the human body perishes quite easily, the human soul seemed to be bulletproof.

It was one brownish-grey afternoon that Thea finally got a taste of what it was like to push a soul to its limit. In a rush of madness, and fear, Thea's parents almost died to protect her from herself. Sage was too young to remember such a catastrophe but it haunted Thea every night since.

All she remembers is a burning sensation build in her chest. She remembered her parents eyes growing wider as Thea tried to call out to them "what's happening to me?" she tried to scream, but no voice came out. Instead the burning just grew hotter, so hot to a point she didn't think she could bear. And then it was all over.

In a blink, the heat was gone. Her parents were strewn halfway across the Pavilion, and her hands were shaking. In a couple minutes, palace officials were filing in, the elders were crowded around her parents who were just beginning to stir. Among those elders was Madrid who just happened to be carrying baby Sage in her arms. But Thea would never forget the way Madrid looked at her that day. It was a look that pierced her heart; fear shadowed Madrid's eyes, her mouth was twisted the way one's would be right after flinching from a raised hand. Her knuckles had turned white as she hefted Sage closer to her shoulder. Thea who took in the sight of madness, feeling the growing guilt hit her body like a wave, she turned and ran, and somehow, amidst all the fear and shame she felt, she felt a woman's faint laugh reverberate within her chest, almost as if it was her own.

After that incident, Thea never believed she belonged. It took years of convincing from her parents and from her sister that she was still part of the family. She would hide in cave after cave, reserving herself for the wild since that's where she believed she was welcome. Her skin had grown accustomed to the moon, and lost its golden shine. Instead her skin would glow a cool silver-like grey. Her eyes had paled over the years to a delicate mossy green, and her hair had faded to an ashen grey. Even when her appearance started to change, and her presence had seemed unnerving, she had a certain kind of grace about her. Instead of sparkling like the sun, her beauty seemed to mimic the moon itself, and her sister loved her for it.

Grant watched with a twinkle in his eye as Thea and her sister walked down the Golden Hall, arm in arm. Nothing could compare with the gleam that shone off their skin as the twin princesses exhaled in unison; They bowed as Madrid placed the Wreaths of Bask on top of their heads, letting the shower of sunbeams fall just short of their faces. Thea, with her grace was tall against her sister, and instead of long desert locks, her hair was more the color of sun-kissed dew. Grant drew a sharp inhale as Thea glanced at him from under her eyelashes, as much as he wanted to, he couldn't hide his eyes. Suddenly, she made a face. She scrunched her nose and crossed his eyes, eliciting a snort from him that several townsfolk scolded him on. Muttering apologies, he turned around and stopped as he saw Thea's eyes flash with mischief. He wasn't a child anymore though, and he couldn't afford to ruin her coronation as much as he wanted to with the passing of little trivialities.

The beating of the ceremonial drums and the sparks that skidded off her heels were an intoxicating combination. Thea crossed the sea of dancers to get to Grant, and he tried to hide his excitement behind a pitcher of Gilded Mead.

"C'mon Grant, I know you like to dance!" Her voice was silk against his mead-soaked ears.

"Thea, we aren't children anymore. And besides, I'm trying to get used to taking up rather refined past-times of my own." He paused and gave her a sidelong glance, his eyebrows raising in mock supremacy. "I suggest you do the same."

Thea laughed at his words and grabbed his wrist, her skin sending jolts of electricity up his spine.

"I thought you'd say that."

She pulled in into the crowd where they got lost together.

*Silk.*

*Mead.*

*Gold.*

*Fire.*

And suddenly Grant was fifteen again.

The air was crisp with the first breeze of evening, and Thea stood just before him peering over the high tower walls. The sky turned the desert sand a dark indigo and bronze and he couldn't help thinking he was witnessing a sort of magic of its own. "It's so—" Thea broke off, even when her back faced him, he could feel her mind racing. She turned around and her mossy eyes took him by surprise. "Boring?" He finished. She searched his eyes for a minute before turning back to the desert, her whisper was barely audible against the haunting silence. "Strong."

*Fire.*

*Gold.*

*Mead.*

*Silk.*

Back at the party, his fingers laced through hers as she spun into his outstretched arm. Her head tossed back in a light laughter, but the only thing that was going through his mind when he watched her dance was *strong*. Her fingers grazed his neck but he jerked back.

She rolled her eyes.

"What happened to you? You used to be so carefree." Her voice closed down on his consciousness and he could feel the affection that laced her words.

It was addicting.

"Here," She purred.

"Catch me as I fall."

Hands reached up and brought his face closer to hers, lips so close that didn't need to touch to understand each other.

He pulled away.

"Well that's just it. Now I care." With a quick bow and a ruffle to his hair, he turned away. His feet feeling like liquid.