

Chapter 2 – visitors

“I still feel some days it was all my fault.”

The sky is turning red as the sun reaches the edge of the horizon, and the land is consumed by warm colors and cool air. With darkness, the first, smaller white moon, named Vastu, eventually becomes visible. In mythology, Vastu was the fourth child of Fornin, the god who created all, before her death by her fifth child, Nicron, the god of darkness, cold, and death. The four siblings fight eternally to hold Nicron from consuming everything. They say eventually he will. They also say the cold darkness Nicron represents is the power of Anhi.

The large insect marches forward in the darkness, slowing down as the light fades from the land. On the top of Pickle is Matheus sitting, with Sophia next to him covered in a blanket sleeping, hugging the orb that flickers a faint blue light on her face.

Matheus takes a glance at his sleeping daughter, an uneasiness glooming over him, then turns his attention back on the road. They almost arrived back home.

As they enter the forest, the darkness entirely consumes everything. Matheus takes out a lamp like object, as he turns the bottom crank on it, the golden alloy on top of it flickers, then emits a warm light. He hangs it on one of horns of Pickle, lighting up the road ahead.

The familiar turn comes on the dirt road and their home peeks out of the large tree trunks. Though something doesn't feel right.

As they get closer he notices a large insect with unfamiliar horn shape and a person leaning against the entrance door. The lights flicker inside their home faster than a candle could possibly could. Matheus quickly turns the crank off the lamp, stops Pickle behind a tree nearly as wide as the creature, then wakes Sophia.

Sophia slowly opens her eyes, in the darkness she can barely see her father's distressed expression, but she can feel his shaky hands.

“What’s wrong dad?” – Sophia asks carefully

“Listen to me. I want you to hide below the seats on Pickle, and not to come out until I tell you so. This is really importan-”

Matheus quickly turns his head as the sound of glass breaking reaches them. He grabs his axe from the storage below the seat and jumps off the mount with a light thump, slowly disappearing in the darkness of the woods.

Sophia’s heart is racing and tries to understand the situation, but listens to her father and hides below the seats.

Matheus takes a long arc around the house, hiding behind the trees, the sound of muffled arguing and punches makes his breathing faster, and the axe slipping in his sweaty hands.

As he reaches the back door of his home, he peeks inside the window, and sees Hanna, being held down by an Adept soldier, with a lawkeeper watching.

The soldier has the symbol of a new recruit on his cape, and the lawman is barefoot standing in a strange position, but he doesn’t seem drunk.

Watching, his arms feel weak for a moment and his stomach twists so hard he feels like throwing up.

But he doesn’t back down, and opens the back door carefully, tries to not make a noise.

But the door squeaks.

The lawman and soldier turn to the noise.

Matheus slams the door open and as he raises the axe, he runs towards the soldier holding down his wife

“Get your hands off of her!!”

The lawman with no visible distress on his face, throws a handful of seeds in front of Matheus and they begin to burst into vines crawling up from the wooden floors onto his legs, making him trip and fall, dropping his axe.

The lawman seems to control them as his face is in stiff concentration and his fingers do gentle but deliberate motions. As the vines rapidly grow, one launches the axe up and impales it into the ceiling.

“WHAT’S GOING ON?!” - Matheus screams and his voice cracks from the pain as the vines pull on him.

“Calm down,” – Says the lawman with frustration – “Your partner is an unregistered Anhi user, which is a crime since the first cycle!”

Matheus barely listens to the man as his gaze is focused on Hanna with teary eyes and bruised face, held with her mouth covered.

The man continues - “She’s been confirmed to use a mind controlling blessing as we tried to take her to the city for judgement. She must’ve been manipulating you as well.”

Matheus snaps his eyes on the man

- “She never did such a thing, she wouldn’t harm anyone!”

The lawman walks up to Matheus with visible annoyance, and grabs his face, pulling him – “LOOK AT MY COMRADE, AS HE IS TRYING TO HOLD HER DOWN.”

Just now Matheus sees the expression of the soldier, his eyes are also teary and his chin is shaking from distress.

“I-i-i wanna go home, please.” – Says the officer, crying.

The lawman turns Matheus and looks into his eyes.

“He is one of my most disciplined soldier yet he whimpers. She is using her blessing to attempt an escape.”

Matheus looks at them, his struggling with the gripping vines slowly stop as the remaining strength leaves his body, his voice becomes sorrowful – “Please...She didn’t do anything wrong. Just let us live in peace”

The man stands up and glances on the ceiling as he reaches for the axe.

“You are a good man. But you’ve been tricked. You and your family never had a glimpse of Adept training, people like her a danger to this nation. Your daughter is lucky, without the ceremony, we couldn’t have found this manipulator”

The moment he says that, the front door creaks open, with Sophia looking inside, lit by the faintly glowing necklace on her neck and the flickering light of the orb she still holds. She is sobbing and tries to say words but they don’t come out. A man in the dark outside leaning next to the door, watching her, but does not seem to care.

Hannas eye snap wide, bites the soldier to which he flicks his hand away in pain.

“Please don’t hurt her! Just take me in!” – She pleads to the lawman, and she stops struggling in the hands of the soldier.

The man looks at her, then nods to his colleague, who in turn lets her go, and with the same motion he collapses on the floor and begins throwing up.

“Fuck..my head is throbbing.” – he says with a broken tired voice, his gaze is unfocused and aimless.

The lawman then ties Hanna’s hands together behind her back, along with her mouth, and putting a blinder on her as well.

Sophia runs towards her father trying to untie the vines, but they don’t even nudge.

The lawman turns towards them – “Don’t worry, your child is safe in the school, she will get a proper license and training. And we can track her in case of misuse...”

“The empire would never do such a thing!” – Matheus snaps back at him.

The man’s expression sharpens on hearing those words leaning down to him – “The empire let people like her freely abuse the population...It’s a new world now. Consider your mind clean, you should thank us.”

Sophia tries to hit the man on the face but with a simple motion he stands up and she falls over, missing.

The adept soldier gathers himself from the floor, brushes his clothes off, looks at Matheus spitting on the ground – “How dare you speak of our oppressors in a such a manner?”

The lawman slips his feet back into the sandals he left at the side of the door and the vines noticeably weaken in turn.

They begin to take Hanna on their mount and walk away along with the man outside waiting for them.

Matheus with enough struggle manages to eventually free himself of the weaking vines, and hugs Sophia who’s sitting on the floor, crying.

“Where they took mom?” – She hyperventilates, barely getting those words out

Matheus holds her closer - “We will get her back.”

“...I miss him hugging me like this. I miss my mom holding me...”

“I wish i’d remember what really happened in the court trial, I was too young to understand and my memories are fuzzy...”

“...In the end, mom never came back. The last time I saw her, she wore the ragged clothes of a prisoner, with metal gloves on her hands, on chains...”

“...The crowd looked like statues, no emotions, not a care in the world. I felt like the whole world was hating my family..And i hated them for it...”

“...My dad changed after that day, he became quieter and distant over time. I wanted things to change so badly...”

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“...So I focused on my studies to distract myself. The 3 years of base school passed eventually and it was time for the Adept school..It felt wrong attending, but I wanted to know more about the world, and do what I can to make things better.”

1205, 3rd cycle, 10th

The house in the woods is quiet, the crack from the axe in the ceiling is as untouched as the day it was created. The warm sun shines through the window, sparkling the dust particles in its rays. Upstairs, Sophia is shuffling in her own room, packing paper and ink, and she puts on her long sleeved purple coat, with the back reaching all the way to her knees forming a triangle shape. She also puts on a belt on top of it around her hips, closing it up in the middle, to break the silhouette...and to make it look less like a robe.

Robes aren't cool these days right? She isn't sure, but they feel a bit too proper, and they don't have a dress code in the Adept school, the only instruction she got was to sew the symbol of her sensing type on a visible part of the outfit. She decides to sew the Anhi symbol on the right shoulder of the coat. She brushes the outfit with her hand all over, and nervously leaves her room.

Outside, Matheus waits for her silently on Pickle. The insect is full of goods packed. Raw materials like wooden boards, tiles, and various tools like wooden gears or latches. He's been spending a lot of his time working the last years.

Sophia hops up on the seat, and they began their route to the city. The road is silent, not a single words spoken for a long time. Sophia takes glances at her dad every now and then, then back to the road, playing with her thumb trying to occupy her thoughts.

“When is she coming back?” – Sophia says eventually, under her nose, not even looking at him

Matheus furrows his eyebrows for a moment but doesn't take his eyes off the road and besides a quiet grunt, he remains silent and the tired expression slowly fading back on his face.

They eventually reach the city wall, and she gets off Pickle, patting the insect as she starts walking.

"I'll be waiting at the gate after school" – Sophia says, looking back at her father

"Alright." – He replies with tired voice

"Okay," – She pauses for a moment – "See ya later dad."

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Eventually she finds her way to the school, which wasn't hard to notice among the endless wooden buildings on top of shabby stone foundation, the large stone brick building with statues on its side, depicting the symbols of each Adept Senses, a large metal gate on the front with the name "Nadia Adept School", and one soldier standing in duty.

She hands her credentials to the soldier, and walks in the gates, and the bland grey outside of the school opens into a lively inside where the building hugs around a large field of grass with a fountain in the middle, sparsely shaded by trees, students chatting and studying under the trees and on the benches, vines on the walls wrapping into the gaps of the bricks and kids staring out on windows, the tower peeking out of the front of the school, with a clock telling the time on top.

She absorbs the beauty of the place, smiling, however her mood gets darker again because she notices students around her whispering to each other seeing the symbol on her arm.

She begins picking on the skin on her pinky finger, and tries to walk away from it at a fast pace but her presence is like a magnet among metal dust. Eventually she stumbles into the large sign put out for every first year student, she walks up to it and finds the classroom she supposed to be at, 2B7. She looks up on the tower clock, and realizes she only has a few minutes left before the class starts. So she begins to run inside the building and frantically go between corridors seeing everything but the first number not changing. “1B3 , 1B2, 1A7.... Where is it?” – She thinks to herself frustrated peeking into corridors just to look at the signs.

“Hey girl! You new?” – A boy with fluffy brown hair and a dark skin asks her from a distance.

“I’m looking for 2B7” – She explains, panting from running.

“I’m going there too, come with me” – He smiles and flicks his hand in a motion to follow her.

As Sophia catches up to the boy walking up the stairs she asks – “How do you know where is it?”

“I asked” – He shrugs like it’s the most natural thing to do.

“Oh, Right” – She replies under her nose, feeling a bit embarrassed.

“Second floor, right side, seventh classroom, that’s what it means.” – He adds looking at her for a while.

“Makes sense” – She nods looking at her feet

“We are here! Don’t get lost again girl!” – The boy says as he rushes in the classroom

Sophia follows, wanting to tell him her name so he won't call her just "girl" but she second guesses and decides it would be weird to do so.

The classroom is large and could hold probably over a hundred students, half of which are already seated. She finds a spot and sits down somewhere around the middle, the people next to her shift one seat away leaving a gap around her. The attention on her is broken by another Anhi student, a boy with a tan skin and short black hair shaved on the sides, arriving to the classroom, sitting down at the back corner of the room, seemingly ignoring all the attention. Sophia only realizes how obviously she stares at him when he looks at her and cocks his head up with an angry expression almost as if saying "What are you looking at?!"

A piece of crumbled paper hits her head, and she looks behind her, seeing several students snickering at her, and the boy with fluffy hair she met earlier pretending to whistle and look away though taking glances at her.

She stares at him blank for a moment before turning back without a reaction, however for some reason she felt betrayed deep down. She is used to kids picking on her, however back then it was because she focused too much on her studies.

The teacher eventually arrives to the classroom and everyone quiets down. Besides the orange hair and large glasses, the older woman wears the usual teacher outfit, brown pants with a bandage like cloth tied around the knee area going down into the leather boots, and a shirt with a green colored cape indicating her own sensing type. The defined wrinkles between her eyebrows and forehead are sparse but noticeable even from a distance.

"So, is everyone here? The tower bell already got hit, I won't wait longer!" – She speaks as she settles her books at her desk.

“This year’s class belongs to me,” – She continues – “when it comes to class schedules or events, I’m the person managing it and giving you information. My name is Monarda, and I teach general Adept classes like this one!” – She turns and writes her name with a brush holding hard bristles, on the large board in front of her.

The class is silently watching, with some whispering between students.

“So! In this class you will learn about the general concept of what we know about energy senses, well researched abilities, and techniques to bring your first blessing out. Any questions before we start?”

Sophia raises her hand, but Monarda seems to be looking around the class waiting for more students to do so as well.

Eventually 2 more students raise their hand and she points at some pale girl in red clothing.

“Can I go pee?” – The girl asks embarrassed.

“Stupid question, no!” – Monarda replies fast, confidently, her voice echoing through the room “Should’ve gone before class, Next!”

She points at Sophia

“What is a f-first blessing?” – Sophia says shyly, cracking her voice, resulting in some giggles nearby her.

“Straight to the point!” – Monarda points approvingly and as she turns to the flat-cut rock board behind her, smearing the blue letters on it with quite aggressive motions.

”So! First blessing is what we call the first ability that after hard training manifests in you. It will be insignificant and useless first, you have to keep improving and branching it out, into something more useful. Some might not like their blessing, And you can try with something else but trust me...It’s near impossible without experience on how to control your first one.”

She looks back from the board to Sophia

”But for some, it might be wise”

She looks at the board again and begins drawing several circles, connecting them

“There are several divisions we know of inside each sensitivity. Nola for example divided between Flesh and Nature...”

Sophia writing vigorously trying to copy the rest of divisions on her notebook.

Plia – Divided between Liquid, Energy manipulation, and Air...

Scor - Divided between Electricity, Light, and Heat...

Muli – Divided between Metals and Gravity...

As she takes notes, she notices her sensing type, Anhi, divided into three divisions:

Cold

Mind

Sound

She lingers on Mind for a while. After thinking about it, she raises her hand.

Monarda in the middle of talking, sees and snaps at her “...Soo that’s why...What? What do you want?”

Sophia’s hand twitches down for a moment, then asks

“Will I get similar blessing as my parents?”

“Yes and no.” - Monarda replies calmly to the other seemingly good question. – “Your sensing is hereditary, but the division inside it doesn’t seem to be. And you can also learn another senses, different from your parents, but the difficulty is so great even most teachers here are Mono Adepts” – She explains.

Hearing all this, makes Sophia curious and blurt out without raising her hand

”Wha-”

“NO MORE QUESTIONS,” – Monarda raises her voice frowning her eyebrows.

”Or I won’t be able to finish this subject today!! SO where was I?!”

The class continues and Sophia focuses on making notes silently, feeling a bit foolish.