

## SANCTION

The pollen of Adamanjor was eradicated by the burning power of the Unconquered Sun to save Heaven itself from auto-consumption. The Games of Divinity were bad enough.

Everyone knew the Maiden of Serenity had a variant of Adamanjor's lotus hidden in her Secret Garden; that when Luna left the Garden Districts to ride high over Creation as the Full Moon or to stand over Creation with her husband, invisible at High Noon, that the Sisters gathered for a long night of well-deserved unwinding. Well, maybe not everyone knew that.

Was it in Her honor that you smashed the box underfoot? The chalk with her very sigils on it coming apart into the sweetest dust... think of that! Her short, manicured nails holding the freshly-pressed ball, the prints of her fingers embedded in the chalk, a brush of gold paint sealing the piece for safety, openable only by intent and never by accident. She was always the cautious one, not like Journeys or Endings, those reckless girls. Though not as cautious or slow to act as Battle.

Was it to feel Yushan again, the city of pure spirit, the very heart of the Order of things, even if you were destroying part of it? Or was *that* the point? And a long, dark, and hidden thought suggested: to save Creation, was it possible that the destruction of Heaven itself was required?

What did saving Creation mean, exactly? Did it mean what the Lawgivers, the Solar Exalted thought it meant: fight back the Wyld, keep Malfeas Imprisoned inside His terrible dreams, create works of Wonder so mighty that all who saw it were inspired... or filled with a hopelessness so deep it would never come out? Or was it something simpler?

Was it being so full of delirium that you felt sane again? Was it pulling the body of a used-up, 1-handed warrior woman out of a cavern where fire and madness were breaking the fabric of Creation itself, while someone moved in the background, hacking and cutting, bits of bone and gore flying in the name of justice? Was it leaving her in the arms of a dragon-statue with 2 ancient gold coins pressed over her eyes? Someone had kissed someone. The Naughty Thing was there. Had you kissed it? Did it give Strength of Olives some invigorating gift?

Why did Onyx and Grayn keep wandering through your memories holding hands?

## ONYX

**After the burning golden sigil burst inside the rainbow that was the Gossamer's mind made flesh... there's very little left.**

**There was so much blood. Darkness. Sharp and broken pieces of glass. Screams. Your hands as hard as the black glass walls, cutting and cutting into flesh that deserved any mortification that came upon it. Streaked in gore.**

**Someone screamed. Did a lot of screaming.**

**The dark moon set under the earth. Pasiap can quell even the light of Luna.**

**You remember tender, bearded flesh against your face, and the little laughter of a Naughty Thing.**

**Did you sit in the dirt fashioning makeshift boots for men as wet and muddy as though they had been rebirthed in dirt?**

**Someone said to Wilder Cain, "I love your hair. Could mine be that red? For my wedding?" Who could that have been?**

**Did you dream that you were lying on a rock with the colorful stars of all Five Maidens overhead, Grayn naked beside you? Surely you weren't naked, even in a dream? Did you say something that you can't quite remember, about fulfillment and desire?**

**He said something completely devoid of human emotion about a child who had taken from him to the Blessed Isle.**

**Did you lie with your head in Sanction's lap while he told you a story about the wedding of Luna and the Unconquered? Something salacious and wonderful. Or was that the Naughty Thing?**

**Did you really pull Grateful Bitch aside and tell her to keep her claws off Chain or you'd cut them off for her?**

**Who can say?**

# CEAUN

*The story of Strength of Olives might be the story of all lesser beings in the face of the Celestial Exalted. Did Sanction say that? No. Oh, no. It was down in the dark under the earth, after the water sang its stone-crushing glories. It was the grubby voice with green eyes, all curled up on itself. It was the voice chained down like a scorpion under glass in your shadow.*

Do you remember red hair and cool hands undoing your armor under a ruined roof?

You remember the sound like the grinding of teeth that stones make when the flood has them. You remember the symphony of pure water, your blood running clear. Walls coming down. There were several nearly-human shapes that the water took like your fists, and pummeled and pummeled into the hardest volcanic glass. They deserve it, they deserve it, was a pulse inside your head that did not comfort you.

There was blood on stone, sinking into the earth's pores. There was blood in the water.

Sanction was standing, as still as stone, at the bottom of the well. A frustrated Oakskin was shouting at him, perhaps in another language. He was holding Strength of Olives in his arms.

Then the dragon had her. Not the dead Gossamer whose mind was free and devouring the caverns below like acid eats at cotton. The statue of the dragon man gathering water. She lay in its arms, like they were made to hold her. You or Sanction, or both of you all at once had just finished a story about her, and the Naughty Thing had tears in its eyes. Sanction produced two soft-worn coins about the same age as the whole world. He laid them over Olives' eyes. Wasn't that for the dead? "Gold is for the living, like the sun," Sanction had said, confidently. *Gold is for assuaging guilt*, said the green-eyed voice drowning again in your shadow.

Could you actually see, or did you imagine, the faun kissing the coins gently, and little motes of life passing from him into her, the blue tattoos on her body burning for a moment with new life?

Had there been lovemaking in a broken tower? A woman with living green eyes? Did you swim naked with Wilder Cane (whose eyes were brown as river mud), playing like siblings while searching for river cane to cut?

Do you remember Onyx pressing himself against Grayn, crowned by two of the Maidens' stars? Do you remember Oakskin slapping you? Or was that Onyx? Or Grateful Bitch? Or was it Grayn's body slapping into you from behind? Or was that Oakskin as a man, red beard as wild as Oakskin's feminine eyes?

Who can say what is true? All feelings are valid. All experience is experience.