Shad'ia

a short adventure into a world ridden with
the unnatural, the uncertain, and the unforgiving

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Frozen air echoed throughout the valley isle of Ayn Shakkallah, blowing west across the ring of mountains and growing ever colder with each passing moment. The sound of wood hammering against wood could be heard throughout the town as doors slammed and crates of food were thrown into peoples' homes without a second thought. Tall workers romped through the snow warning the townspeople to remain indoors. Lighting along the streets flickered on and off as the heavy wires danced about malevolently in the shaking wind. Icy gusts blasted throughout the alleyways. One unfortunate couple, hammering their hands on the door of their home, seemed to be stuck outside.

Her light brown hair flowing behind her head to just above her shoulders and wearing a pair of goggles around her neck, Amalyn Ridhe stared out at them, slightly worried.

*'Poor Mr. and Mrs. Levin… I hope they manage to get inside alright,'*Amalyn thought to herself as she looked out at them through the Allsee glass windows of her home.

The Levins continued hammering on their house's doors, hoping for an answer.

'The only other person who lives there is Noah, and he's only twelve like me. I hope he's alright. It's been almost a day and a half. Where is he?...'

Amalyn looked up at the pitch black sky. She was glad the Allsee glass allowed her to see it through the relentless storm. It had been a long time since gazed out upon its dark horizons. The deep, lightless hole in sky reminded her of a story her grandfather had told her a few days ago.

"Amy-en, Amy-en, c'mere, c'mere! Look up! Hurry, or you'll miss it!"

"What?! What is it?! Where? Where are you looking? Faw'ven? Where?" Amalyn turned her head up at the sky. "Noah'den, you too! Come help me find it."

"Already looking, Ly'en."

"Look…" Faux said as he waved his rough, thin, dusty hands in the direction of the sparkling stars. "…up."

"But, Faw'ven… I don't see anything, just stars."

"Just… wait… a bit… longer."

"But, I don't know what I'm s'posed to be looking for." Amalyn ran her fingers through her hair and the smirk of intrigue began to fade into a frown of confusion. "I don't understand."

Noah turned and tossed Faux a questioning look, one eyebrow raised and his lips forming a shape just short of a frown. "Yeah… so what are we looking for again?"

"Don't worry, Amy-en, Noah, just wait. You'll see. Just watch, and see."

The stars continued to sparkle and Amalyn laid in the cold grass listening to the wind blow past. Spreading her arms like a snow angel, she let the wind help her relax. The soothing sound continued to echo for a few minutes.

Shine. One of the stars in the sky blinked much brighter and then shot forward. "There it is!" Faux stood up and pointed at the glowing light.

"Wow~" She stared the beautiful shooting star. "Hey! Hey, Noah, look!" Amalyn sat up slowly, still watching the glowing light soar across the starry skies until it vanished into the blackness in the distance.

"What?! What'd you see? Hold on, show me! Show me! Where is it!?" Noah suddenly got very excited.

 Amalyn looked at the blackness for a bit and then said, "It's… It's gone… F-Faw-ven! Faw-ven! I-i-i-i-it's gone." She sniffled and rubbed her eyes and nose into her sleeve.

"No, no. Amy'en. It's okay."

"No, it's not! The star went away…"

"Oh… Ha… ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! --- *cough*" Faux laughed heartily before stopping to cough. "Amy'en. No, that's not what I was talking about. You see those glowing stars in the sky?"

"*sniffle* Yes…" Amalyn wiped her tears away.

"Well, each and every one them is a soul. Just like you and me. We call that the bed of souls and when the souls move on, like that little buddy that flew away, they get taken by the Skystealer!"

"The Skystealer?"

"Yes! The Skystealer slowly takes the sky away and brings the bed of souls slowly to a better place. Now, one day, I'll go up there too and one day I too will be taken by the Skystealer."

"But I don't want you to go, Faw'den…"

"It's alright. When I go, I'll be going to a better place to the diamond in the dark; but that won't be for a long, long time; a place of warm sunny skies and beauty like the old stories."

"Really?" Amalyn looked at Faux in awe.

"I don't know about you Ly'en, but I don't get all this complicated stuff. Sounds to me like the Sky just ate the star. Man, I can't believe I missed it." Noah stood up and kicked the ground.

"Don't worry Noah, one day you'll understand it too. One day you will. Do you two see the Zephren fortress atop the mountain in front of the Skystealer?"

Both in unison: "Yeah."

"Well, that there's the best place to look out at the Skystealer. Boy is it beautiful. I'd show you, but I have to head home now. It's getting pretty late."

"Eh? But you were just getting started!" Amalyn quivered her lower lip.

"You're so adorable you know that Amy'en? Don't worry. I'll see you again and when I do, I've got another great tale to tell you about the Circle people of Marua!"

"But I don't wanna wait!"

Faux laughed as he waved and walked away towards home.

'I wonder if he's already up there… I wonder what Faw-ven would do at a time like this…

Guess, I'll never really know…'

A man's hand tapped Amalyn's shoulder a few times before the man's spoke her. "Ly'en, back away from the window it's dangerous."

Amalyn turned around to face her father. "Huh? Oh. Heya, Daa'den.[1]" She looked back out the window at the couple still stuck outside before turning back to face Aaron. "Have you heard from the Levins? I haven't seen Noah in like, three days. Is he okay?"

"It's alright, Amy'en. I'm sure he's fine. I heard from the neighbors that he seemed sick the other day. Other than that I'm sure he's perfectly fine, sweetie. Don't worry."

Amalyn pouted and looked up disapprovingly upon her father. Tears welled up in her eyes but she wiped away the tears hoping Aaron didn't notice. She glared at him for a moment and then turned away again to continue staring at the stormy town through the Allsee glass window.[2] In the middle of the public stage, the Zeph leader sat in plain robes lighting up the Zephyr Crystals, one-by-one. He would place his right hand upon each one and give off a slate gray glow as he transferred his own willpower into each crystal, giving them just enough power to produce light.

Aaron shut the blinds covering the window just before the man started the Zeph Appeasement Ceremony. Amalyn growled at him before running back towards her room at the end of the hall, just past the entrance to the kitchen.

As Amalyn neared her room, Aaron returned to the kitchen to speak with Cona. "Cona'en, I just don't know what to do. I can't just tell the girl her best friend has been missing for twenty four hours."

"Aa-den, it's not your fault. Please don't blame yourself for this. It's the fault of the Zephren Order and you know it. It's their fault that Zephyrus wasn't appeased before the Winter Festival. It's their fault that Noah is missing and this storm won't end, and it's their fault that my father is dead!" Cona's arms were shaking heavily as she sat at the table, tears flowing down her face. Her long wavy black hair was disheveled from her hands ruffling through it so many times. "I can't believe such a thing happened right before that young boy's eyes. He always did love my father's company. My father, despite his shortcomings really did have a great heart. He really did love the kids… both Noah and Ly-en." Cona buried her tear-covered face in Aaron's shirt.

Aaron whispered to Cona, "Faux went out there of his own free will. If not for him, then Noah would be dead. He made a noble sacrifice. I just hope his soul rests in peace… oh Zephyrus, why?"

Amalyn almost overheard every word from around the corner of the hall. They were shouting fairly loudly, so it wasn't too hard, but Aaron's last words were a bit too hard to hear. Still, she reluctantly returned to her room and laid down on her bed to rest. She didn't want to hear her maa'den cry any more.

Just then, as she laid down on the soft cushioned surface, she remembered. *Wait! That's it! I think I might know where Noah'den is!*

Amalyn burst out of her room and bolted for the door.

"Ly'en?" Her maa'den's soft sobbing voice stopped when she heard the door swing open and the wind blast in. "Ly'en, no! Come back, don't go out into the storm!" Aaron and Cona darted for the door but once they looked out, she was already long gone.

'Jeez, it's cold outside… and windy for that matter. I can't see a thing. Better put on my goggle so I'll be able to see. As Amalyn put on her goggles, she became able to see through the storm and the path to the fortress immediately became clear. Buildings, roads, trees, and faraway mountains, she could see it all. *'Guess they don't call it Allsee for nothing'.* She stared up at the top of the hill where the old Zephren fortress stood and, again, started walking.

~One hour later~

"Noah'den! Where the heck have you been? Your parents have been worried sick."

"Ah! Oh. Ly'en. It's just you." She could hear him heave a great sigh. "What's up? You feeling any better?"

"No, ah, I've been looking for you."

Just then then lights on the center of the public stage turned azure blue; a sign that the ceremony was complete. The storm died down and the sky began to clear up over the next few minutes.

The starry night was now in full view. Amalyn and Noah laid down next to each other atop the fortress walls, looking up. Amalyn's eyes rested upon the bed of stars in the sky and in a few moments, she spoke, "You know, Noah'den. We used to think of the stars and planets as gods and spirits, but we discovered that they actually exist, right? Just like Faw'den said, it's the 'bed of souls.' I wonder if he's already up there. Faw'den, I mean. Maybe he's already beyond the Skystealer."

"The Skystealer's just a story, Ly'en. We know next to nothing about that black wall." Noah barked back at her, though he didn't seem directly mad at Amalyn.

"No, seriously. I bet that there's a 'star' out there beyond the Skystealer just waiting to be discovered! A diamond in the dark! You know that? Just like Faw'den said, and I'm gonna be the first to find it on Faw'den's behalf. Maybe, if I'm lucky, I'll find him too. I'm gonna travel out there on my own to go find this 'diamond' for myself."

"Eh? The adults all say it's too dangerous to approach Niel. Why would you want to risk the danger?"

"What's life without a little danger, Noah'den? Besides, you know I don't believe any of that nonsense. If the stars weren't dangerous, there's no reason why the Skystealer should be any more dangerous. I'm going, I've made my decision."

"That's stupid, we can't even reach the stars. What makes you think they're not dangerous?"

"Intuition?" Amalyn proposed.

"Intuition? Are you kidding me? This is your life we're talking about here. Don't be crazy. Besides, how are you going to get there?" Noah sat up and looked down at Amalyn's face sternly.

"I'll find a way."

Noah sighed and slumped back upon the battlement floor.

The two of them sat atop the icy cobblestone surface just staring at the sky for a few minutes. Then Amalyn broke the silence, "C'mon Noah'den, lets head back home before the others start worrying about us even more. My maa'den's probably worried sick about me and yours about you. Plus it's gonna get really cold up here if we don't hurry up, and I don't wanna freeze to death. Let's get home before we get iced, okay?"

"I think this is *probably* a bad idea."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, you shouldn't go to Niel."

"And why not?"

"Because it's probably dangerous! Are you sure about this? I mean, you've heard it from the others too, right? There isn't anything good beyond that wall, no matter how much you may want to believe in Faux'den tall tales. Why do you think everyone calls him Faux?"

Adamantly, Amalyn replied "I'm more sure than I ever have been. And how dare you mock his memory by saying such a thing. Forget it. I'm going home. Goodbye, Noah."

NOTES:

1- Shakkallian for father, although, '-den' is an honorific (not unlike oriental honorifics) attached to the names of those someone hold's very dear. Its typically used to refer to guys and often used between partners, family members, and extremely close friends. Sometimes '-en' is used as a substitute for girls. '-an' may be used for holy objects or otherwise important events or things, but heroes and valiant people in myths and legends are referred to with the honorific 'ven'.

2- Allsee glass is used because it allows people to easily see beyond it without much effort regardless of storms or heavy wind.

3- Niel die Kälte – a black hole like objects (as far as anyone on the planet knows)

SIDE NOTE OF LESS IMPORTANCE:
The ZAC is very important because if it isn't performed regularly, Zephyrus will grow impatient and wreak havoc upon the town. It is a heavily traditional ritual and as such requires some degree of a sacrifice. The people of Ayn have come to use Zephyr Crystals however as a method of appeasement in recent years.

THE END