

WOLF
DAUGHTER

&

THE OLDEST
MAGIC

stories from the world of
Echo North & Wind Daughter

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by
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Wolf Daughter

There is a monster in the West Wind's palace, and the monster is me. I am woman, I am wolf. I am neither, I am both. Once, I helped my mother trap a man, just to have power over him. Once, I betrayed the only friend I'd ever had for the chance to have a human face.

But that is not me anymore. Now, I am a prisoner of the West Wind, and it is only a matter of time before he remembers what I am, and destroys me.

I was wounded when he brought me here, but I was aware enough to feel the warmth of his white wings as we flew into the sun. Wind caressed my cheek and soothed the hurts my mother left there. Beyond the sun, all burnished and glowing and yet not hot enough to burn me, was a country made of rain, where green things grew impossibly in the air. Above the rain country, on a high white cloud, was the West Wind's palace. It was made of flashing bronze, and I shut my eyes against its brilliance.

Then there was the sensation of an echoing hall, the soft give of a bed, a pillow. Whispering warm fingers over my hurts, the feeling of wounds knitting back together. The bliss of dreamless sleep, long and dark.

I wake to a room that is strange, bright. The walls and floor are beaten copper, softened with a woven rug and a white wallhanging that seem to be made of rippling feathers. There is a window set high on one wall, with notches cut at regular intervals for climbing up to it. I do, the copper wall cold on my feet. There is a shelf butted up against the window, furnished with a white cushion that is made of more rippling feathers, more than wide enough to sit on. I kneel on the cushion and press my face to the glass, my lupine nose not allowing me to get as close as I wish.

I look out into the rain country, and it is green and gray and beautiful, and there are beings out there in the sky, riding tiny green horses with wings and chasing each other among the raindrops.

I watch them awhile, until hunger grows, and then I climb back down again and accidentally catch sight of my reflection in the mirror that hangs on the copper wall beside the copper door. I punish myself. I stare at my monstrous face: lupine snout and lupine teeth, wolfish ears showing dark amidst my silver hair. My eyes are the only feature I do not hate: large and violet, staring back at me beyond my fur-covered cheeks. I reach my hand out to touch the glass, but this is an ordinary mirror. It cannot sweep me into the world of a book, where my flaws are made to vanish and I become what I long so dearly to be: human.

I turn away from the mirror and open the copper door, stepping through into a huge, echoing hall, enormous stone arches reaching up into fathomless dark. The hall is so large I cannot see all the way across it. The copper door is built into a wall of carved stone, and I get the idea that if I shut the door, it will disappear entirely and I will never be able to open it again. I stand uncertainly, my fear of the vast space warring with my hunger. At last my hunger wins out, and I step slowly away from the copper door. My

feet slap against bare stone, echoing eerily, compounding until it sounds as if an army walks with me. Yet I am alone.

There is a flicker of movement ahead, and I focus on the small shape of an ordinary brown sparrow. It flutters away to the right, chirping insistently, and I understand I ought to follow. So I do, and we have gone no more than a few paces before a red door appears before me, the handle made of intricately carved brass. I open it onto an outdoor terrace, a brass wall guarding the edge. Beyond, once again, is the rain country.

In the center of the terrace is a low, rectangular table, spread with food. My mouth watering, I go and kneel on the waiting cushions. I fill a plate with food I do not recognize: little cakes made of grains, unfamiliar fruits, a soft pink bread, a bowl of thin blue soup, a glass of green wine, swirled with silver. I eat, and I drink, but every last thing is bitter on my tongue, and that is how I know this spread was not meant for a monster like me.

I eat my fill anyway, because I am used to the taste of bitterness. I know it can sustain me.

When I am full, I rise from the table and pace to the copper wall. I peer out into the rain country, and I do not understand why but I weep, the fur on my cheeks growing damp.

It is in this state that he finds me.

“Mokosh,” comes his voice behind me, “Forgive me. I did not mean to leave you alone for so long.”

I turn and he is there, the burnished form of him golden and gleaming as the sun, with his wide white wings folded behind his shoulders. He is so beautiful it hurts to look at him, and I feel more monstrous in his presence than I did on my own.

The sparrow who led me to this terrace perches on his shoulder, and I wonder it is not burned up in the fierceness of his presence.

“My lord,” I say, and drop to my knees before him. I do not want to grovel, to beg, but I also do not want to die, and isn’t that what I deserve? Isn’t that why he brought me here—as punishment for my crimes? I do not know why my punishment is to be worse than my mother’s but it seems it is so. She was changed into wolf form, the memories of her evil deeds taken away. I am damned to remain in this half-state, every wicked thing I’ve ever done blazing in my soul.

“Mokosh,” he says again, and his voice is so gentle. “You do not need to kneel before me.” And he comes to me, takes my hands, draws me to my feet.

I am nearly at eye level with him, and yet I feel impossibly small in the presence of a man who may as well be a god.

“What will you do to me?” I ask him. A warm wind ruffles through the curtain of my hair, and the feathers on his shoulders stir in the current.

“Do to you?” He frowns, as if the question confuses him. “I mean to offer you healing. Comfort. Help you to find your place in the world, and bear you there when you are ready. I meant to be just beyond your door when you awoke, but I was needed at the Temple. I am sorry.”

His words mean nothing to me—no righteous being could ever apologize to a wicked one.

“I understand it must feel strange,” he goes on, “—few have ever come to my house, save my father and brothers—certainly no mortal. But you will find it, I hope, a place of rest. Was the food to your liking?”

I should lie, but I do not. “Its bitterness choked me.”

A softness comes into the chiseled planes of his face. “I am sorry, lady, that it was bitter for you. I did not mean it to be. Come, let me show you the parts of my house you might find habitable, and allow me to teach you how to navigate the parts that are not.” He gestures toward the red door, meaning for me to walk back through it, but I fold my arms across my chest and stand my ground.

“Why am I here?” I say through gritted teeth. “Why am I *really* here?”

His face softens even more, like for the first time he’s realizing how truly wretched I am.

“To heal, dear one,” he says quietly. “To heal, and to find peace and new purpose. Your mother twisted you, hurt you, made you into something I do not believe you ever wished to be. There is peace in my house, if you can accept it. There is hope. There are new beginnings.”

Something in his words spark tears in me. I blink them away. “Can you fix me?” I whisper. “Can you transform away the monster she made me to be?”

Pain presses lines into his beautiful face. “You are not a monster, lady.”

“Then what *am* I?” I say fiercely.

“That is for you to choose, Mokosh. No one else can choose it for you.”

The sparrow on his shoulder chirps a bright note and flits away over the railing, out into the rain country.

“Now then,” says the West Wind, “Will you permit me to show you my house?”

“No. I want to be free of this place. Let me go.”

His brow bends, the confusion back in his face. “You are not a captive here, Mokosh.”

My spine is molten anger, hardening into blade-sharp steel. “What else could I be? I am trapped in the West Wind’s house in the sky—I do not have *wings* that I could leave here at my will. So I am a prisoner, at my lord’s mercy.”

Something dangerous sparks in his eyes. “You were—broken—when I bore you from your mother’s court. Where else should I have brought you? North’s house is empty and dark, and my brothers South and East have little love for mortals. Few can dwell more than a moment in my father’s house, and my mother’s is cold and bitter to those who go there.” The wind is back, stirring through his wings, rifling my skirt about my ankles.

"I'm sorry to have *burdened* you in such a way, my lord." It's half a shout and half a growl and I do not know who I hate more: the West Wind, or myself.

Yet one corner of his mouth goes up. "A prisoner and a burden—you hold yourself in high regard, my lady Mokosh."

"I'm not a *lady*," I spit.

"Then what are you?" His tone is mild but his gaze sears me.

All the pieces of me are cold and small and tight. "I am a monster, a demon from another world, like my mother before me. Let me go, my lord. Or will you force me to stay here?"

"Do you truly think your worth is so little, my lady?"

My hands clench at my sides, wolf-sharp claws digging into my palms, drawing blood. I focus on the pricks of pain so I can bear the intensity in his gold eyes. "What you did to my mother—is that what you mean to do to me?"

"Mokosh." My name on his lips is impossibly, infinitely gentle. It's the gentleness, more than anything else, that makes the tears press hot.

"I have healed you of your physical hurts. I have carried you from your mother's court. You are a guest here, in my house. I have not harmed you, nor will I. There is healing yet for you, here. But if you do not wish to stay, I will bear you from this place at once, and you never need see my face again."

I touch my own face without meaning to, the fur damp beneath my fingers. I have never despised myself more.

"Where will you go?" he asks quietly. "Have you always been with your mother?"

I blink and see a village ringed with a stone wall. Music echoes in the square, zhaleika and drum and domra. The stars smile down and I dance, a warm wind tangled in my hair.

"Not always," I say. "There was a time I stayed with my father's people. It was

part of his bargain with my mother, I think." My earliest memories are of that village—I lived there for the first twelve years of my life, raised merrily with cousins, or at least some relations. I never met my father. I am sure my mother trapped him in her court, while time spun away and his friends and family grew old and died. But I didn't know any of that, then. I was terrified of my mother, when she came for me. I thought her a monster of the worst kind. And then she brought me to her court and revealed to me my true form, and I came to understand that I was a monster, too. After that, my human face existed only in the book-mirrors: a fantasy, a falsehood.

"The village at the base of the blue mountains. Is it still standing?" Hope and fear and want beat sharp through me. For centuries, my mother wielded the North Wind's power over time, and my life has never corresponded properly with the world at large. I don't even really know how old I am, how much time has passed since my mother plucked me from the only place I was ever happy.

"Yes," says the West Wind. "It is still standing."

"That is where I want to go. Take me there." Heat pours through me—I have just commanded the West Wind, a being older than time.

But he nods. "Then come." He strides through the red door and down the vast, dark corridor and I follow, my eyes caught on his white wings. The feathers glimmer, traced with gold.

He passes through a tall door, out onto another terrace, smaller than before, awash with dazzling sunlight, warm and liquid enough to swim in. He steps onto the short bronze wall that borders the terrace and unfurls his wings, blocking out the sun and leaving me to blink in the sudden play of light and shadow. He glances over his shoulder and says again: "Come."

I balk. "I do not have wings, my lord. Have you forgotten?"

"The sky horses have gone with my brother North, and I have not the patience to tame the dragons or the whales from the rain country. I must carry you."

"I do not wish for you to carry me."

"I have carried you before."

I cross my arms. "I do not remember." A lie. I dreamed of it, I think, the whole while I slept in the West Wind's House. "And I do not trust you."

His golden brows tip up. "Why, Mokosh? Have I given you a reason to doubt me?"

"You have no cause or call to be kind to such as me."

"A woman caught in her mother's schemes? Her mother's cruelty?"

"Not a woman. A wolf. A monster. A demon from another world."

"Ah yes, you said that before." West folds his wings back on his shoulders again, stepping down from the wall as he turns to face me. "What do you mean by it?"

The sun slides away, the golden light touching every part of him, and every part of me, and then it's gone and there is only shadow, gray and bleak.

"That is what my mother was. And so that is what I am, too."

The West Wind folds his arms across his chest. "My father is the Sun and my mother is the Moon, and yet I am neither of those."

"*You* are not exactly a usual case, my lord wind."

He smiles, ever so slightly. "Your parents' blood flows in your veins, but you are more than their blood. You are your own, your thoughts and feelings yours, your beliefs, your choices, too."

"I betrayed my only friend in all the world because *my mother* asked me to, because I wanted what she promised me, what wasn't even hers to give. How does that make me different from her? I am a monster, *her* monster, through and through."

He studies me, inscrutable as stone. "Will you permit me to carry you, my lady Mokosh, or will you stay here, in my house?"

Wind breathes over the courtyard; it's warm and smells of honey and earth and growing things. This is a place of life, joy, wisdom. This is the house of a god. I have no

right to be here, and I cannot stay. "Carry me, then."

He scoops me up, quick as thought, one arm in the bend of my knees, the other under my shoulders.

"Hold on," he says, and that is all the warning I have before he leaps from the terrace, his wings spread wide to catch the wind.

A scream pulls from my throat, but we don't fall for more than half a second before he beats his wings and soars into the sky, my weight little effort for him to carry. He belongs here, I realize, as surely as any bird. I find I've looped my arms around his neck, holding on, like he bid me.

He glances down, meets my eyes. His face is very close to my face, and I wonder—what does he see, when he looks at me?

I feel wind on the fur of my cheeks, and I am ashamed. I look away.

I ought to be afraid, perhaps, but I am not. The wind and the flap of his wide wings lull me to sleep. So I do not know how long we fly, down from his great house, across the earth, to the village at the foot of the blue mountains.

I wake as we near the ground, as he lands lightly on his feet and sets me on my own. I stumble, but he catches me, so I do not fall.

I shiver in the cold as he puts space between us. It's twilight, stars pricking white about the mountaintops. A pine forest stretches away to the west and a fox peers at me, wondering what sort of creature I am. I stare at the trees and feel lost and sad and small.

The West Wind said he would set me here, and then I would never have to see his face again, but he doesn't leave, not yet. "What troubles you, Mokosh?"

"There were no trees here, when I was young. My cousins and I—we planted ten saplings, straight and sticky with sap. We didn't think they would last the winter." The winter my mother came for me, in her silver sledge, with her cold demon at her side. Now there is a forest, thick and old. It has grown more than the village, which slumbers behind a high stone wall. I wonder what they built it to keep out. I wonder when they

built it—it looks old, too. A century. More.

“Do you have a place to go?”

His tone is neutral, careful. He knows I do not—how could I? I think of the house built against the side of the mountain, high enough it looked over the village. There was a garden, a pen for goats. I wonder if it is still standing.

I shudder with cold. I look the West Wind in his glorious face, and hold my chin high. “Yes,” I say. I should thank him but I don’t know how. I turn and stride away, toward the village wall, realizing belatedly that my feet are bare, my clothing thin. If I cannot find shelter I will freeze. And who would take me? The villagers I knew are long, long gone, their children and grandchildren too.

But this is the only place that ever truly felt like home. The only place that belongs to me, and not my mother.

So I stride through a wooden gate and onto a cobbled street, following the paths of my memories through rows of tightly-packed houses, lanterns burning in windows. I go up, toward the shoulders of the blue mountains, toward the old house. I reach the end of the path, step into the old yard.

The house isn’t there, and my heart sinks. But why would it be there? *How* could it be there? Centuries have spun away, since my mother claimed me.

I pace further into the yard and find the house is not *wholly* gone. There is a crumbled part of a stone wall, a divot in the ground where the well stood. It existed, and its reality makes me breathe a little easier, because it means that, once, I existed too.

I gather wood in the light of a rising moon. I scrape a shard of iron against a stone until sparks fly, igniting my kindling. And then I huddle in one corner of the broken foundation of my childhood home and I wish for just the tiniest piece of my mother’s magic. With it I would rebuild the house, make flowers grow bright around the door. With it, I would change my face, smooth away any remembrance of the wolf. I would be happy. And one day, perhaps, I would find another soul willing to be my

friend. Then I could wholly forget my mother, and her wickedness. Then I could forget my own.

Somewhere in the firelit dark, I sleep.



I wake to a sharp, hot pain in my side. I'm on my feet the next moment, dawn a silvery haze before my eyes. There's smoke, too, the blear of torches. A group of figures melting into shadow: three people, four. The glint of steel. I press my hand against my side and it's slick, wet.

"It's alive!" shouts one of the figures, the one who, I think, poked me with his sword. His face resolves in the mix of torchlight and gathering dawn: he's young, a half-grown boy with dark hair.

"What is it?" says a girl, his sister perhaps. Her voice is high and sharp with fear.

"A demon," an older woman tells her, certain, calm.

The boy again: "We must kill it."

"I am not a demon," I say, though that is not what I told the West Wind.

The fourth figure, a middle-aged man, brandishes his torch at me, peering closer. "Then what are you?"

Dawn turns gold at the edges, the sky brightening. I cower against the wall of the mountain, pressing hard at the wound in my side; blood drips between my fingers.

"What happened here?" I ask, tense and ready to run should they come any closer. "To this house? To this family?"

"What do you know of this family?" demands the boy. There is anger in his face. There is fear, too.

"I lived here, once." I don't know why I say it. They can't possibly understand. "Long ago."

The sun crests the ridge and there is no hiding what I am, my ears and furred

face, my tail, my claws.

The four of them stand frozen, spellbound by the true horror of me. The older woman goes hard and cold, a statue of chiseled marble. I can't help it—I search each of their faces, looking for the barest shadow of the ones I used to know. But there is nothing.

It's the girl who speaks, a slip of a thing, with hair as pale as her brother's is dark. "This was Great Grandmama's house. It was in our family for generations upon generations. Some say it was the very first house built in the village. I used to come every morning to brew her tea and cook her porridge and milk her goats. She was very old, you know, and she told the most wonderful stories."

My heart flits in my chest, a frantic, caged bird. "What kind of stories?"

"Hold your tongue, Tanya," admonishes the woman. "This devil creature will seduce us if we let her speak."

"If we let her *live*," growls the boy.

But Tanya ignores them. "Ancient stories," she says. "Filled with magic and danger. She swore all of them were true."

"Stories are always true," I say. "Even the made up ones."

Tanya takes a step toward me, though her brother grabs her arm and holds her back. "Great Grandmama told one story, over and over, that her own Great Grandmama had told to her. The story of a many-greats aunt with silver hair and violet eyes, stolen away in the night by a cruel winter queen."

Ice and longing flood my veins. I take a step toward Tanya, the wound in my side beginning to make my head wheel.

"It was you, wasn't it," she says. "Somehow it was you."

"Rada and Valya," I whisper. "They were sisters to me. Makar and Patya and Vadik, brothers. My uncle Alyosha and my aunt Mila. We squeezed all together in the tiny cottage and we were so very happy."

But the rest of this family have had enough of me. “Don’t listen to her, Tanya.” The man—her father, I assume, steps in front of her. He switches his torch to his left hand and draws the sword buckled at his waist.

I remember the sharpness of my claws and my teeth, remember that I do not really need to be afraid. Yet the blood drips from my side and how could I hurt them? They are my kin. I step sideways, so I can see Tanya again. “What happened to your great grandmama?”

For a moment, she doesn’t answer. The sun rises higher, burning away the chill of the night. But it does not warm me.

“The cottage burned,” says Tanya thickly. “With Great Grandmama inside of it. There was the scent of ice, and pulse of magic. There was the sound of wolves. And when I came—”

I take a breath, trying to stem off the rage, the grief.

Tanya swallows. “When I came to the cottage, it was ashes, and *she* was there.”

“Who?” I ask, but I know.

“The Wolf Queen.”

I’m shaking all over, I collapse to my knees.

“You are hers, aren’t you.” Tanya’s voice has gone hard. “You came to see that her handiwork was complete, that nothing remained.”

“No.” My voice shakes, too, and I revile myself for the tears that dampen the fur on my cheeks. “No. I came to find my family. To see if there was anyone left here who remembered me.”

“You are a *monster*,” spits the father. “You will be remembered only by the pelt I will hang on my wall.”

It’s Tanya who snatches up a stone and hurls it at me. It thuds into my collar bone and there’s a delicate snap like a tree branch breaking, and blinding, white pain.

The boy throws himself at me, knocks me to the ground. He tears at my hair and

I snarl and claw at his face and he screams at me, he curses my soul. He cannot know that I am already cursed, that I'm not certain I even have a soul. I twist away from him, every movement a new agony.

Then I'm hurtling down the path from the cottage, fighting to stay upright, fighting to outpace them. They throw more stones at me as they give chase. One hits me in my good shoulder, nearly knocking me off the mountain. Someone throws a dagger; it nicks my cheek and then there's a new line of pain, nagging and hot like a splinter.

I run without seeing, without knowing, the world a haze before me. It is only when the salt touches my tongue that I realize I'm crying.

They give up pursuit somewhere outside of the village walls, but I don't stop running, bolting into the towering forest I helped to plant long ago. Deep in the wood there is a cave in the rocks and I slip into it, curling tight against the agony of pain and grief. It is an animal's den. It smells sharply of urine and musk. But I am not afraid of wild creatures—they are my truest kin, after all.



It is a wolf's den. I know when I wake a while later, in a blur of pain, because a wolf and her two pups are curled up next to me, twitching in their sleep, bellies round and full. They are warm, and I'm grateful for their warmth, but that alone is not enough to save me. The cut in my side is still bleeding, more slowly now but still too much. My right shoulder has gone numb, but reaching fingers find the break on my collar bone. I push and the pain sears, sharper than before.

I cuddle the wolf and her pups, I weep into their fur. I wonder if there is spirit enough in these creatures to drag me out into the wood when I die, to dig me a grave with their quick feet and cover me with earth and pine needles. Or if they will eat me.

I have no thought for anything but death. Life has been overly long, and overly bitter, and I will rest, at last, in the Weaver's great House, unless my soul is stained too

much for him to bear me thence. Then there will be only earth, and bones, and gnawing worms. It is what I deserve, so it is fitting that that is what awaits me.

The world goes dark around the edges. The stone where I lie is damp with blood. Soon it will all seep out of me, and I will pass into the darkness, and all of this, *all of this* will be quiet, will be still. It's all I want, now.

I don't understand why I'm crying.



I catch his scent before I'm even properly aware of his presence: honey and deep earth, growing things and swift-coming rain. There is the scrape of feathers against stone, the growling of the wolves, a word of magic in his strong voice.

I peer at him through eyes sealed nearly shut with swelling and salt. There is no pain now, only numbness. He lifts me, I think—he must. Because then we are flying, up through dark air, between wheeling stars and splintered moonlight. I am dreaming in the moments before my death. There is no other explanation. And yet the scent of him is so very strong, and his arms are warm. I look into his face. I want to speak to him, to ask him if I am dreaming, but no words come to my lips.

“Hold on, Mokosh.” His voice sounds very far away. “Hold on.” I am not sure he if means to him, or something else. But in any case, I do not know how to do it.



There is nothing, for a bit. A vast and consuming emptiness. I died, perhaps. But it is not the end.

I am aware of... a *place*. It is dark but not wholly, green light pulsing from some unseen source, and the very air feels alive, teeming with ancient power. I lie on a hard surface, softened somewhat with a thin mattress. There is a sheet of silk pulled up to my chin. The air is cold but I am not. I blink and there is a light burning on a table beside

me, a flame not tethered to oil or wax. I stare at it a while, trying to understand it, before giving up and shifting my attention to my surroundings: I am in a low chamber, an arched doorway looking out into a shadowy stone space. There are carved pillars I cannot see the tops of, and beyond them a back wall open to a vast, wheeling sky. Swirls of violet and green dance in the darkness, and I get the idea they are galaxies upon galaxies, worlds beyond worlds.

Then he is here, in the doorway, coming into the little chamber, kneeling beside my hard bed.

“Mokosh,” he says.

My eyes find his, and tears once more dampen my furred cheeks. He wipes them away with gentle fingers and crouches back on his heels, looking for all the world like an anxious boy.

I sit up with a start, coming fully back to myself. I touch my collar bone, the wound in my side. There are faint pulses there, like the barest memory of pain, but they are no more.

“My Lord West,” I whisper. “You have healed me.”

He dips his chin, but doesn’t move from his spot on the floor. “You were nearly gone, but there was enough magic, in this place, to call you back again.”

I cannot bear to cry anymore. I bite the inside of my cheek to keep the tears from coming. My teeth are sharp, and I taste blood. “Why did you call me back?”

He studies me, his expression unreadable. “Are you feeling a little better, my lady?”

“Yes.”

He nods again. “Would you permit me to show you the Temple?”

I think of his offer to show me his house, and shame coils like a dragon in my gut. “Yes.” The repeated word sticks in my throat.

He stands, wings stirring at his back, and extends one hand. I take it, and step

down from the bed, his fingers folding warm and large around mine. He doesn't let go, just leads me through the archway, out into the temple proper. I wish I was lion instead of wolf, so I could retract my claws and be sure not to scratch him.

We stray all through the Temple, past carved pillars and countless alcoves like the one I woke in, all with a thin mattress on a slab of stone. We pause a while before the back wall, looking out into the vast and chaotic beauty of the worlds. He does not let go of my hand, and I do not pull it away. I am not sure which bothers me more.

"The Temple of the Winds was built for us all," says West. "My three brothers and I, a joining of our four realms, a place of healing and rest. But it is I who found a talent for healing, and so I am the one who cares for the Temple, and the people who come here."

"How do they get here?" I ask.

"Some are found, by my brothers and I, and borne here. Others find their own way, through cracks in the worlds where winds can slip through."

"And this?" I say, waving to the swirls of violet and green.

"Life," says West quietly. "Time. Magic. All the worlds that ever were, all the worlds that ever will be. The Temple stands between them all, a piece in every corner of every world."

"Then you *are* a god." I don't mean to voice the thought in my head, but it comes out anyway.

He turns his face to mine, a crease in his brow. "No," he says. "I am but a single piece of a single world, bound to it, as the oceans are, as the forests are. I watch over my realm as best as I can. I heal those I am able to heal. But that is not always enough. I must endure, on and on, until the magic of this world is at last unbound, and I may present myself to the Weaver and take my long-awaited rest in his great House."

"My lord, you are unhappy." It isn't a question. The realization shocks and unsettles me.

He gives a sort of half smile. "Is it any made creature's right to be happy?"

"Perhaps not. But nor is it an evil thing, I think, to pursue it." My cheeks heat, because no matter what he says about himself, I know I have admonished a god.

He looks at me as no one else has ever looked at me, and I am suddenly, acutely aware that he is still holding my hand. I imagine I feel his pulse beating quick in my palm, though I do not know if a Wind possesses such an ordinary mortal thing as a heart.

There comes the sound of a distant bell, and he tugs me wordlessly away from wheeling galaxies. We pace once more through the temple, stopping at an alcove beyond a stone arch. A boy lies on the slab, a wicked gash across his forehead. His breathing is quick, erratic. His eyes are shut tight.

West lets go of my hand and I instinctively take one of the boy's. His skin is cold and strange—he feels already very much like a dead thing. But I do not recoil. I am no stranger to corpses. My mother collected them like jewel-headed pins.

West bends over the boy, touches his wound with gentle fingers. Magic pours from his lips like honey and wine, and for half a moment I can see the threads of it, whispering into the boy's skin, knitting the gash shut. But even when the wound is closed West does not cease his magic until the boy's breathing evens out, and his heart beats steady, and even his skin warms beneath my touch.

And then the boy fades from view. I blink, and the slab is empty.

"Where has he gone?" I whisper. "How did he come here?"

"He has gone back to his world," says West. "He came through a crack between: a song, perhaps. A prayer."

Bitterness blooms once more in my heart. "None of my prayers were ever answered in such a way, and I said many of them, when my mother first brought me to her court."

Sorrow comes into his golden eyes and I look away; I did not mean to say that

out loud.

“Answers come in many different forms. Few of them are ever exactly what you might wish.”

He touches me, the brush of his finger on my furred cheek. I recoil, and he drops his hand. Another bell sounds, but for a moment he doesn't move.

“Come with me, Mokosh?” There is a hesitance in his voice that doesn't fit a being older than time. I realize with a wrench that he is lonely. I dip my head.

He doesn't take my hand again, but I follow him to the next alcove, where a woman lies on the slab. She is neither young nor old, and has no visible wound on her, but she pulses with a strange and wrong magic. She is awake, alert, her eyes fixing first on West, and then on me. I don't know why she doesn't flinch at the disparity in our appearances: a beautiful god, a hideous monster. I glance at West, who regards this new patient with a gravity that makes fear pull at my heart. He is not sure if he can heal her.

I take the woman's hand and she clings to me, not noticing—or at least not minding—my claws.

West kneels beside the slab, bowing his head over her. He places one hand on her forehead, and one on her heart, and the feathers of his wings brush against my skirt. Magic spools out of him and I can see its threads more clearly this time: colors in every shade I know, and many I do not. They are beautiful and powerful and teeming with a magic older than I have ever felt, saving my mother's alone. Her magic was frigid, bitter, cruel. His is sweet and warm as honey, and yet laced with so much sorrow a sob catches in my throat. I weep onto the woman, and she weeps with me, her lips moving in silent, desperate petition.

West gasps, and his magic is cut off. The woman lies still, but there is a color in her skin that was absent before. He kisses her brow, and stands to his feet.

“Will she be well again?” I ask him.

He shakes his head. “I do not know.”

For a while we stand together, watching her. She sleeps, perhaps she dreams, her chest rising and falling in a gentle, steady rhythm.

“You gave threads of your own magic,” I say. “To heal her and the boy. To heal me.”

He meets my eyes and his are weary, but he smiles. “I am a wind, my lady Mokosh. As long as the world endures, I will have pieces of myself to give. It is my purpose.”

“But are there any left for you?”

“What need have I of magic for myself?” He takes a breath.

I reach out a hand to steady him. “If your offer is still valid, my lord, I would be honored to dwell a while in your house.”

Two bells chime at once, and the West Wind sighs.

“Are you able to tend more people, my lord, after you have already given so much?”

“I must, so it does not matter if I am able.”

“You are very morose, my lord.”

A slight smile touches his lips. “I am able, my lady Mokosh. If you will help me.”

I do not know what real help I can give a god. But I go with him, and I give it anyway.



There is a door in the Temple that leads directly to the West Wind’s House. We step through it, after he has healed so many people and poured out so much of his magic I don’t understand how there can be any left at all to sustain him.

A feast awaits us on the terrace and the sparrow flits above it, chittering at West as if worried at his long absence.

We sit. We eat.

The food does not taste quite as bitter as before.

When we have eaten, West rises from his seat and turns to me with a far away look in his eyes. "Forgive me, Mokosh. But I must go and rest a while."

Rest is what he needs, and that, desperately. But my heart wrenches. I do not want him to leave me. "Of course, my lord."

He gives me a wan smile. "You have only to call for me, if you need me. We will speak soon."

And then he is gone and I am once more listless in his great house. The sparrow lights on my shoulder and twitters in my ear. Before I woke in the West Wind's House, I would have snatched the creature up and swallowed him whole. But I am not what I was then. I am not sure what I am, not anymore.



There is a garden, in the midst of West's house. Or, at least I think that is what it's meant to be. It's a square patch of earth, open to the wide sky, and stones mark out little borders around where plants and flowers ought to grow.

"Sparrow," I say to the bird, who has not left my side since West went to sleep, "are there seeds to be had here?"

The bird flits from my shoulder to the ground and back again, before singing a few bright notes and flying off into the house. I follow. He leads me to a small room behind a green door. Lights flare as I enter, illuminating a hodgepodge of shelves that are stuffed with boxes and jars and books and clothing and trinkets and maps—anything I can imagine, and many things I cannot, seem to be housed in this room. Sparrow darts around from shelf to shelf, inspecting the contents, and after a few moments trills at me from somewhere in the midst of the mess.

I find him sitting atop a small brass chest. He obligingly hops off so I can open it: inside are tiny pouches of seeds, labeled in a magical language I cannot read. The chest

is deeper than it looks, and holds far more than it should be able to. "Thank you, Sparrow," I say. "I'm glad I didn't eat you."

He laughs a little bird laugh and I get the feeling he was never afraid that I would.



I dig with my hands in the earth, using my claws to loosen the soil and make holes and furrows in the ground. I plant the seeds, one by one. I cover them gently.

This is how he finds me: kneeling in the garden, my long-since-ruined gown muddied, my claws caked in dirt, Sparrow trilling a counterpoint to a song I have not sung in untold years.

"I did not know my house had a garden," he says.

I snap my head up to find him studying me with a smile on his lips, the magic pulsing strong in him again. He looks much refreshed, his wings stirring in a fragrant wind.

I am startled when he kneels beside me, when he helps me cover the rest of the seeds.

"Do not stop singing on my account," he says. "My house is large and filled with magic, but there is no music here."

So I resume my song, trusting him with the listening of it. When it is done, our work is finished also. We rise from the earth and he folds his hand around mine and this, too, I trust him in.

"Will you come with me," he says, "to watch the rising of my mother's house?"

I nod and he scoops me up without warning, leaping into the air with a powerful flap of his wide wings. Half a breath later he sets me down again on the roof of his great house. He must sit here often, because there are cushions and a low table, a brazier pulsing with blue heat, pierced lanterns strung between white poles.

He sits beside me and we turn to the east. The night grows very dark, the air cold. But West is warm, and the heat curls off of him—so the night’s chill does not touch me.

“What happened,” he says at last, “in the village at the base of the blue mountains? Why did you ask me to take you there?” He doesn’t look aside at me as he speaks, his eyes trained into the dark, looking for the first sign of the rising moon.

“I lived there long ago with my father’s kin, when I did not know I was a monster. When I was beautiful, and happy, and thought I would be always.”

“I am sorry you are not happy.” He turns to me, his face mere inches from mine. He glimmers in the darkness with a light of his own, and almost I cannot bear the splendor of him. “But I hope you know that you are beautiful.”

I *stare* at him. “My lord—”

It is then that the moon begins to lift above the earth, the arc of it golden and shining, and it steals my breath away. A scent like jasmine bursts into the air, and there comes the sound of wind rushing through trees in full leaf.

But the West Wind does not look at the moon. The West Wind looks at me.

“My wolf form is not beautiful.” My voice breaks, thick with tears.

He touches my furred cheek with his hand, and this time I do not pull away. “You are wrong, my lady Mokosh. You are beautiful in whatever form you bear.”

His face blurs before me. “They tried to kill me on the mountain because of what I am. When my mother took me, the winter I was twelve—she unbound the enchantment that gave me my human face, and the cousins I thought of as siblings, my aunt and uncle, who were as parents to me—they screamed and they cursed and they threw stones. I thought perhaps it would be different this time. I thought perhaps I could convince them to see beyond what I am.”

His eyes go liquid in the moonlight. “And what are you, Mokosh?”

I look away, and he lets his hand fall, and the absence of his touch is sharp and

awful in my bones.

“I will tell you what I see,” he says. “You are tender and you are fierce, you are courageous, gentle, strong. You are full to the brim with the old magic, but you have forgotten how to wield it. And you are beautiful. Wildly, incoherently beautiful.”

“*You*, my lord, are a magnificent liar.” Anger burns through me and I jerk to my feet, moonlight washing over my skin and tangling silver in my hair. “You should have let me die in your cursed Temple. You should not have called me back.”

He stands, too, his form strong and shining, his feathers rippling in a sudden warm wind. He folds his hands behind his back, and turns to face the moon, the whole of it visible now in the star-encrusted sky. “When I was young,” he says, “I thought I was strong. I fancied myself my father’s favorite son, the only Wind born with wings. My brother North was stronger than me, and I was afraid of him. All of us were. But it was I who incited South and East to torment him, to drive him away from the light of our father’s house to the frigid darkness of our mother’s. There, he grew stronger still. And because he was alone he grew arrogant, and reckless. If I had not driven him away, he never would have gone to your mother. He never would have traded his power to her, giving her far, far more than she was ever meant to possess. And yet tangled in the threads of the world there is mercy, beyond grief and regret and betrayal. Because if North had never gone to your mother—” West turns to me, an intensity in his eyes beyond what I can bear. “—I would have never known you.”

“Never known me? You first saw me in my mother’s court, when Echo defeated her curse.”

He shakes his head. “No, Mokosh. I first saw you the night your mother came for you, in her sledge with her winter demon beside her. We had felt the power leave North, and my brothers sent me out to see where it had gone. I followed your mother, watching from afar as she snatched you from your home, as you lost everything. But North’s power was stronger than mine, and so I could not intervene, lest she snare me

also in her web of poison silk. I followed you, as far as I could, until the walls of your mother's court grew around you, twisting vines that blocked out everything—light, and time, and wind."

Tears burn hot and I try vainly to blink them away. "I remember," I whisper. "In the dark and the cold, in the horror of my mother's coming and my family's rejection and the pain of my wolf form—there was a breath of warm wind, and for a moment I knew hope, beyond the despair. For a moment, I thought perhaps I was not wholly alone." I bow my head into my hands and I weep because my world has broken apart, and reformed into a shape I don't understand. He saw me—in my lowest moment, he *saw* me, and he thought I was worth something, even then.

He wraps his arm around me, pulling me close. I let him, my tears soaking into his collar.

"Forgive me, Mokosh," he says quietly, into my hair. "I would have spared you the pain, if I could."



The seeds have already sprouted, when we visit the garden in the morning.

Something wordless has been bound between us, the wind god and the wolf girl. I am not wholly certain what it is yet, but I am content to let it grow, like the tender shoots pushing their way out of the earth. The garden seems larger than it did yesterday, like it has sprouted too, expanding to make room for the burgeoning life it contains.

Sparrow sits on my shoulder, chattering in my ear. West flicks his eyes to the bird, smiling. The weight of his long and arduous task seems easier than it did, before. He seems younger. Freer. I know the feeling.

I blink and glimpse my future: laughter in this high house, West's warm arms around me, his mouth on mine, his white feathers tangled in my silver hair. Rings on

our fingers, vows spoken solemn into the sun. Magic, bound fast between us, with my own magic singing freely in my veins. It is like my mother's, my power, but it is *not* hers. I will feed it on laughter and love, joy and wisdom—I will not give it bitterness, anger, hatred. And so it will not bloom, as hers did. I am no longer her monster, bound to her will.

But that is later, this is now. I blink again and West stands tall before me, gleaming in the morning light. I feel suddenly shy in the wake of his brilliance, but I am no longer ashamed. I slip my hand into his, unabashed, and look out over the garden. “What will grow here, do you think, my lord West?”

I sense his smile, though I do not turn my face to his. Wind rushes over us, fragrant and warm. “I am not certain, my lady Mokosh.”

“Then I must come here with you, every morning, to see what comes.”

“And when the plants are grown,” he says, “What then?”

I do turn to him now, losing myself in the hope that gilds his gold eyes. “Then we must bring in the harvest,” I whisper, “and prepare the earth for next season's planting.”

“You would stay with me in my house for that long, my lady?” He tucks a strand of my hair behind one furred ear, and strokes my cheek with his thumb.

“Longer, my lord, if you will ask me.”

He smiles. “Then I will ask.”

I mirror his smile, and lean my head on his shoulder. We look together into the garden. We wait to see what will grow.

The Oldest Magic

He's nervous as our horses step onto the terrace, their hooves skidding on the bronze pavers and causing sparks to fly up. I watch him carefully as he slides from his mount, and so I know the snowflakes clinging to the shoulders of his jacket come from *him*, not the icy spray of his horse's mane. He's always, well, *snowier*, when he's experiencing any kind of strong emotion.

I slip from my sky horse and go to stand beside him, taking his hand in mine. His fingers are like ice and I send a breath of wind through him to warm him, never mind the North Wind is cold—it isn't as cold as he is.

"There's no need to be nervous, you know," I say lightly. "We *were* invited. She isn't going to eat you."

"You were invited," he says with a sideways flash of his blue eyes. "I could still be dinner."

I smile up at him. "An invitation for me is for both of us. Everyone knows we're a matched set."

This pulls a smile out of him, and he reaches out his free hand to play with a tendril of my hair. His fingers grow a little less cold in mine. "You are forgetting, though, my dear North Wind, that I killed her mother."

"With the claw *she gave me*," I remind him. "It's all right, Fannaris. Really." I don't like to think of that day either, or of the grave I dug for the Wolf Queen on another world far away, when I thought Fannaris was lost to me forever.

He must sense my sudden sadness, for he kisses my brow and folds me into him. I hold him tight, and listen to the steady beats of his heart thrumming through me. He is not immortal, as he once was, as I am. But there are decades, yet, before that must be faced. The Threads have told me.

"Don't cry, Satu," he says soft, in my ear. "I am not going anywhere. I wouldn't dare."

He reads me as easily as I read him and I know he means it, though he doesn't have any control over that, not anymore. I take a breath and wipe away my tears with the back of my hand.

"Satu!" comes a bright female voice. "Is that you?"

I step out of Fannaris's embrace and turn to find Echo and Hal striding across the terrace to meet us, four-year-old Peter sitting on Hal's shoulders and looking about him with huge eyes.

The sight of them cheers me. "Echo!" I pull her into a swift hug. She smells of cities and laughter and strong, sweet tea, and I have a pang of regret for the human life long lost to me.

"Thank you for sending the sky horse to bring us here!" she says when we've

finished embracing. “Peter won’t forget it as long as he lives, though Hal and I nearly died of fright trying to hold onto him.”

I laugh. “The horse wouldn’t have let him fall.”

Fannaris and Hal hug each other, too, matching broad smiles on both of their faces. Neither of them have quite gotten over their miraculous reunion, brothers displaced out of time. Hal *looks* older than Fannaris—he’s lived here, in this one constant time, for longer—but technically Fannaris is fifteen years his senior. It doesn’t seem to bother them at all.

Fannaris grabs little Peter and holds him upside down by his ankles while the boy shrieks in delight. When he’s turned so red I’m afraid he might pop, Fannaris shifts the boy up onto *his* shoulders, and lets Peter play with the snow in his hair.

The group of us walk together to the broad steps of the West Wind’s house, and I take Fannaris’s hand again as we go up them and pass through a massive bronze door.

My Uncle West is waiting for us just inside, wind rifling ever so slightly through his white wings. There is a weariness in his eyes I’m not used to seeing there, balanced by a wild, fierce joy that sparks off of him. “Welcome, my friends,” he says with a smile. “Mokosh is in the garden.”

I have been in West’s house before, but the others have not, and their joy and awe at the otherworldliness of our surroundings make me happy. I should have them to my house, perhaps, in the north, though when I brought Inna there once she declared it “so depressing not even the most drastic remodel could fix it.” So maybe not.

Fannaris’s hand grows icy again, and I squeeze tight, hoping to reassure him.

“She won’t eat us,” says Hal in a low voice to Fannaris, on his other side.

“Probably.”

I realize that Hal is nervous, too. Has he seen Mokosh since he was a prisoner in the Wolf Queen’s court, all those years ago?

“It will be *fine*,” says Echo firmly. She meets my glance and shakes her head,

smiling a little.

And then we step through a low door into the garden and my breath catches hard in my throat. The garden is open to the wide sky, twice again as big as my parents' house away on the mountain. Vines twine up bronze walls, blooming with massive, vivid flowers that scent the air with honey and magic and something else I don't have a name for. Stone paths wind invitingly through countless rows of other plants, which are tall and bright, heavy with fruit or vegetables or flowers. I have traveled to many worlds, and set foot in many times, but I have never seen a garden quite like this one.

Uncle West leads us to the center of it, where a wolf-shaped fountain bubbles merrily, silver and blue water spilling out of its mouth to splash into a wide bronze basin. Mokosh sits at the base of it on a white blanket that looks impossibly soft, her back propped up against an assortment of pillows. Her hand is wrapped around the edge of the little bassinet that sits beside her, her silver hair pooling at her waist. She is in her wolf form, furred ears and furred fingers. She looks up at our approach, her eyes catching on West's. They share a secret smile between them, and then she turns her gaze to the rest of us.

"Satu! Echo!" Her smile softens as she looks at Hal and Fannaris. "Wintars, relax, I'm not going to eat you."

They both give matching embarrassed huffs of laughter.

"Come and see," she adds.

We all go and huddle around her and the bassinet, little Peter too, who settles into Echo's lap and looks like he's trying with everything in him to be still but can't help bouncing a bit.

The baby is sleeping in the bassinet, curled up tight, with furred ears and silver hair like her mother, and tiny white wings like her father, folded against her little shoulders.

"She's beautiful, Mokosh," says Echo. Peter peers in, too, reaching out one small

hand to touch her.

“Peter—” Echo says.

But Mokosh shakes her head. “It’s all right. He’ll be gentle.”

And he is. He touches the baby’s cheek, her hair, her wings, then pulls his hand back and crouches on his heels, staring at her with unfettered admiration.

“She’s called Tuuli,” Mokosh tells him. “When she’s a little bigger, you can come again and play with her, if you like.”

Peter nods vigorously. “Yes pwease,” he says with utter seriousness. And then he leaps up and bolts away along the garden paths.

Echo moves to go after him, but Mokosh just laughs. “He can’t hurt anything. Let him run about.”

West settles down beside his wife, and silence falls between us, but it isn’t a heavy one. Wind coils through the garden, warm and cold at once, North and West together.

Fannaris’s hand is still cold in mine but his presence bolsters me; I am happy to be here, even though I’m feeling small and shy.

Tuuli wakes with a little cry and a flutter of her wings, and Mokosh picks her up and cradles her against her chest, whispering quiet things into her silver ears until she grows calm again.

“I am happy for you both,” says Echo, evidently the only one capable of conversing, now that Peter is off galloping through the garden. “More than I can even say.”

Mokosh smiles. “You have always been so much kinder than any of us deserve.”

Echo shakes her head. “Kindness shouldn’t have to be earned.”

Mokosh looks to me. “Would you like to hold her, Satu?”

I’m startled to be addressed—sometimes I forget that even though I *feel* invisible doesn’t mean I *am*. I nod, and Mokosh folds the tiny child into my arms. She’s soft and

heavy and miraculous. I stare at her and she stares back at me, one of her eyes violet and the other gold. I glance at Fannaris, and my own awe of this child is mirrored in his face.

“Will you ever have one, do you think?” Mokosh asks us with a quiet humor.

“Yes, next year,” I blurt. “The Threads told me.”

Fannaris gives a surprised laugh. “Anything *else* the Threads have told you, my dear North Wind?”

A wicked gleam sparks in his eyes and my face warms.

“We’ll have to work on your house then,” Echo puts in. “Inna tells me it’s in a *dreadful* state.”

I shake my head. “We’ll raise her in my parents’ house on the mountain. If that’s all right with you, of course,” I stammer to Fannaris.

He squeezes my hand. “Her,” he repeats softly.

My stomach flops over. This conversation has gotten quite out of hand, but I’m not sorry for it. I nod, smiling at him.

Tuuli starts crying and West collects her from me, kissing Mokosh’s brow and striding with their daughter off into the garden.

Mokosh takes a breath, and I’m surprised by her sudden nervousness.

“Halvarad, Fannaris,” she says.

Fannaris stiffens beside me, his pulse quickening. Hal goes pale and Echo glances at him in concern.

“I am sorry,” says Mokosh, looking between Hal and Fannaris. “I am so very sorry for the role I played in my mother’s court, for the—for the pain that both of you bore on my account.” She swallows, hard, and her eyes gleam with sudden moisture. “I would beg your forgiveness.”

Hal and Fannaris glance at each other, reaching some wordless agreement. They both get up and go to kneel before Mokosh, one on either side of her.

"You were bound to her," says Fannaris. "As surely as I was. None of it was your fault. *None* of it, do you understand?"

A tear slips down her cheek. She doesn't wipe it away.

"You were trying to get free of her," adds Hal, infinitely gentle. "There is nothing you need to apologize for. If anything it's *me* who's to blame, me who—"

"How do you figure *that*?" Fannaris snaps. "*You* weren't the one at her beck and call for a cool four centuries, carrying out unspeakable—"

"STOP!" I shout, and a sudden gust of cold wind blows them all a few paces apart.

I stand and stride over to them, my vision thick with tears. Mokosh, Fannaris, and Hal look up at me. "It's been forgiven," I say. "All of it. Over and over. We need to forget it, now. We need to move on. There is new life here. Let's make it flourish. Together. It's the only way to heal."

"I agree with Satu," says Echo, coming up beside me and taking Hal's hand in hers. She looks square in her husband's eyes. "My love. You have to let it go."

I kneel beside Fannaris, tuck my arm in his. He bows his head and won't look at me.

Mokosh flicks her eyes over the four of us. "That's what we did, West and I, in this garden. We planted the seeds, and waited to see what would grow. It's this." She spreads her hands out. "Friendship. Forgiveness. New life. That's what I want to hold onto. Will you all hold onto it with me?"

"Yes," says Hal.

Fannaris nods, still not catching my eye.

"With all my heart," I tell Mokosh.

Echo smiles. "And with all of mine."

I am aware, as I sometimes am, of the threads in all of us, currents of life and magic, binding us together. Contentment settles over me.

“Mama!” cries Peter, barreling back onto the scene. “I found a CATPILLOW!” and he proceeds to shove the creature into Echo’s hands, all fuzzy and gold. She laughs and admires it, and then he grabs it up again to show Hal, and then his uncle Fannaris, who he calls “Cul ‘Ris, Cul ‘Ris!”

West returns at a more stately pace, Tuuli fast asleep in his arms. Mokosh rises from the ground and leans her head on his shoulder. He wraps one of his white wings around them both.



We don’t stay much longer, after that, the five of us taking our leave from West and Mokosh. Fannaris and I wave farewell to Echo, Hal, and Peter, as they clamber back onto a sky horse and soar down from my uncle’s great house.

Then it’s just the two of us, hands clasped tight together, staring out into the wide dark sky. The sun has set and the stars are out, the moon just rising in the east.

“Fannaris,” I tell him gently, “it’s all forgiven. You know that, don’t you? The Weaver doesn’t make mistakes.”

He takes a breath, his eyes gleaming with unshed tears. “Sometimes I have a hard time believing it. The things I did, Satu, I haven’t even told you all of them. I—” He swallows. “I am not worthy of any of this. Hope. Atonement. New beginnings. You.”

“Love isn’t about worth. It never has been.” I touch his cheek and turn his face to mine. I wipe his tears away. “We’ve been given this chance. Both of us. Together. Let’s not waste it.”

Our horses materialize in the sky, one snow and one wind, and they come toward us, landing once more on the bronze pavers.

Fannaris strokes my hair and I lean into his chest, drinking in the scent of him. “You have to forgive yourself, too.”

He bows his head over mine, tears falling damp into my hair. "It's hard, Satu. Even after all this time, it's so hard."

"I know," I whisper. "I know."

We hold each other awhile as our horses wait in silence, snow swirled with wind. At last he takes a breath, and kisses my brow, and we draw a little apart again. He studies me in the moonlight. "Where to now, wife?"

I smile, thinking of our wedding among my mother's people, the flowers in my hair, Fannaris's belt of woven blue and silver. That was some years ago, now, or four centuries, depending on how one goes about marking the time. "Wherever we like."

One corner of his mouth tips up. "About what the Threads told you. A daughter. In a year."

"Give or take." I grin and slip out of his grasp, clambering up onto the sky horse while he laughs and mounts his snow one. Both horses leap together into the air and my blood hums with joy, and magic.

Fannaris rides very near me, a softness in his eyes that make my insides turn to jelly. "Then it seems, my dear North Wind, that we ought to prepare the house on the mountain."

The End



Dear Reader,

Thank you for returning to Echo and Satu's world with me!

Back before *Echo North* was published, I sent an ARC around to my writing pod (shoutout to Anna Bright, Jen Fulmer, Steph Messa, Laura Weymouth, and Hannah Whitten), and they read it and scribbled reaction notes in the margins and it was DELIGHTFUL (I highly recommend making your friends do this for you. :D). Several of them were all "OKAY BUT I SHIP MOKOSH AND THE WEST WIND" and I was like..... "HMMM YES GOOD IDEA" and filed it away.

Fast forward to May 2020, pre *Wind Daughter's* first draft. I wrote a paragraph of *Wolf Daughter* on my phone, and then proceeded to hand-write four or five pages in a notebook. I stalled out in the middle of Mokosh's first interaction with the West Wind—I didn't quite know where to go from there. I set it aside. I drafted *Wind Daughter* (where I made the Mokosh/West Wind ship officially canon!) and referred to the abandoned short story for descriptions of Satu's visit to the West Wind's house. I meant to finish Mokosh's story, but just never got around to it.

In March of this year, I decided I was going to finally write *Wolf Daughter* to go in the *Wind Daughter* paperback. (Sadly, that paperback has been indefinitely postponed—let's all keep our fingers crossed, shall we?) It was slow going at first, but I had the delightful experience of attending a writing retreat in June, where I got to write a good chunk of the story in the presence of brilliant creative minds and absolutely delicious food (shoutout to Bev, Claire, Irina, Marie, Rebecca, Rosamund, Suzannah, and Wendee). I finished *Wolf Daughter* when I got home (shoutout to the three VBSes and one LEGO camp for keeping my six-year-old occupied!), and had this feeling I wasn't quite done yet. *The Oldest Magic* just accidentally poured out of me. It felt like writing fan fiction about my own characters. :D I adored checking in on everyone, not least Mokosh and the West Wind, who deserve their happy ending, too.

I deeply appreciate my readers—you mean the world to me! I hope you've enjoyed reading these stories as much as I enjoyed writing them.

Much love!

JRM

About the Author:



Joanna Ruth Meyer is the author of five YA fantasy books, including *Echo North* and *Wind Daughter*. She lives in Mesa, AZ with her husband, son, cat, and giant grand piano, and can most often be found drinking tea and longing for winter.

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