Immortal's Child

by SilverSilence14

Summary

Much time has passed since the fall of Sky City. Our heroes - still searching for home- stumble across a world as ancient as the beginning of time with some secrets there just as old. Follow Jesse and the gang on a adventure in discovering the answer behind the Immortal's Child.

Notes

Dedicated to LunaDestiny and AquacticNaho
Prologue

When our world began, there was only Notch- Notch and the great expanse before him. He filled the world with treasure and wonder, life and death...

But there was no one to explore it, so Notch created the first human.

Strong, fast, smart, and with a great passion to explore, to build and learn. Notch released him onto this untouched land. He blessed him with immortality and the wish that he would explore the beautiful world around him.
The immortal did so; he was a warrior, a builder, and an explorer. In all things he found wonder, delight, and something to learn. From shiny diamonds, to blackest obsidian, from a humble chicken to the feared creeper; the Immortal learned all, he paved the way for others to follow...

The First.

While one world was amazing, Notch found a chance to do more. There could be some many ways to live, so many sights to create. How could endless varieties fit into only one small world?

So, with his power, he created more. Worlds after worlds they began to multiply, each one so different, or so similar but never exactly the same.

"This is my gift to you," Notch said to The First. "So that with it, may you never be without wonder."

For much time it went on this way, but Notch took notice that the First, was lonely. For in his haste to share his wonder, Notch realized that the First was now all alone.

So he created friends. Our ancestors, who helped start the path on our current way of life.

Notch made a great multitude, and spread them out across the worlds. He did not however, create them with the strength, skill, will or the immortality of the First. Instead the free will and desire to choose as they pleased with their life and carry the constant reminder that life was precious.

The First, no longer alone, taught our ancestors the requirements to survive. To hunt, to plant ones seeds, to build their homes.

And so the worlds and its new residents, prospered...

Something however was still not right. The First was still a god among men in his own way. Immortality among mortals was a cruel gift. To see others grow, bloom and wither around you. For the First, the life of a friend was over in a rise and setting of the sun.

So Notch created another immortal.

Notch created a brother.

The brother, Notch created different. For he decided it would be unfair to make him identical to the First. So the brother was a blank slate, to learn from the older, and choose his own life and path. For when Notch created humans, he allowed them to each his own opinion.

However two individuals raised the same means...Both respond in different ways.

The younger brother grew strong, and found his thrill not in exploring the world before him, but within combat. For while the First dug for diamonds, and help the people grow. The other fought
the spawns with unyielding force.

This was fine...for the time being

It came to pass that the younger, soon found no relief in slaying the spawns of this world. They had become weak in his eyes. For a god who had the capabilities to move the very mountains, they were gnats under his boots.

It was the First who suggest his brother protect the people. For much time had passed; and humans were no longer pure as before. Individuals, who found no satisfaction in peace, soon turned on their own kind. This satisfied the younger, and he soon aimed his blade at the corrupt of this world.

It was the First who had failed to notice, the signs. His brother had become more and more aggressive, but still the First ignored the warnings. Perhaps it was the fear of being alone that made him blind to the facts.

In this blindness, the First choose the people over his brother.

It was that choice, which drove his brother to turn on the world.

The result ended in death.

Two immortals, each fighting for their own belief. The First, fought for the people, and to amend the mistakes he had foolishly made. The brother, the lost soul, fought for his belief that the people were beneath him. He had become twisted, and full of hate.

The Dark One.

The battle went for days it seemed. Mountains toppled, valleys cleaved in two. Still the brothers fought one another. The First, still strongly believed he could save both humanity and the life of his brother. But in the end, he struck his brother down; through fire the Dark One was slain, forever removed from this world.

Notch’s original creation was forever scarred, forever changed. Both the first world and the first man he had set out to explore its wonders were no longer the same.

So He sent one last gift. He created a new immortal, gifted with healing to fix the world unjustly wounded.

A woman.

Notch set her down among the mortals and did not immediately send for the First. Instead he let the woman plow her own path, different from the First and the Dark One. When the time was right the two immortals paths would cross. They would not be considered siblings, or treat each other as one superior to their opposite. They would meet as friends, equals.

History writes this immortal as the Healer, or the Second for some.

Together the pair did lead the world into a peaceful time.
History eventually forgot the Dark One. His name never mentioned again, and only the briefest of references can be found in the darkest of places. Those who witnessed the battle of the Immortals eventually passed on in life. The third immortal became the second, and the brother was removed, because history is warped, history forgets.

Time however, will never forget.

-Excerpts taken from a nameless journal; located deep within abandoned ruins.

Chapter End Notes

Cover Art by: Luna Destiny
Many Years Ago...

It's the screaming that catches Gabriel's attention. Despite all the noise from the lightning storm, cracking branches, animals and such, the crying and screaming come out in clarity.

"Did you hear that?" He asks, stopping his horse.

Magnus groans to a stop next to him, he's already cranky and wet, "Now? Really? Great Notch, Gabe, nothing is out there-"

Thunder rolls and Gabriel shushes Magnus, "There it is again, don't you hear it?"

The crying comes again, this time louder. Magnus hears it this time, his eyes narrowing, "Yeah, I hear it? Is that a kid?" he slides off his horse.

Gabriel follows, "I think so,"

"Who the hell leaves a child out in a storm like this?"

"I don't know, but we better find the source before a monster -"

A man bursts from the edge of the clearing, stumbling slightly over a fallen branch. He is soaked, dark brown hair plastered to his skull. There are scrapes and bruises on his exposed arms. The man wears no armor, but a sword rests at his side, hitting his thigh with each running bound.

In the arms of the stranger the source of the noise, a small infant, crying as loud as the small lungs will allow. A piglet is in the other arm, squealing with each jarring motion.

"Hey!" Magnus calls, "Are you alright?!"

The male freezes, feet sliding in mud.

"Do you need help?" Gabriel asks.

"I do," The man's haggard voice replies, gasping breaths escaping between words.

The two members rush up, "How can we help?" Gabriel asks.

The other looks him up and down, dark brown eyes staring deeply. As if inspecting for something, then,

"Take my child."

The warrior is momentarily thrown for a loop, "What?"

The man extends the crying infant out, as well as the piglet, "My son, I need to you take him-"

The piglet wiggles free, rushing off. Magnus gives chase, "I got him!"
Gabriel turns back to the stranger, "I can't take your-
"
"Please, I'm being followed. If Hero- if He catches up, I won't be able to protect my son."

"I'll help you fight him," Gabriel explains, "I'm a warrior, we can take him-"

"No!" There is flash of panic in the other's eyes. "You cannot defeat him, he is too strong. Please, he's already taken my wife. I beg you; don't let me lose my son."

Gabriel hesitates, and then reluctantly extends his arms, "Alright, I'll protect him."

The relief is immediate, "Thank you," he passes the child into Gabriel's arms, "The piglet is Rueben, don't separate them."

The stranger gently kisses his son's forehead, "I'll be back soon I promise."

There is what sounds like thunder cracking in the distance, till Gabriel hears rocks rolling. The stranger stiffens. "Hurry away from here, if I don't find you in a weeks' time, I'm dead. Please find him and Rueben a good home if I don't."

"Wait what is his name?"

The stranger leans in, "His name is-"

Magnus comes crashing back into the clearing, holding the thrashing piglet in his arms, "I got the bacon,"

Gabriel frowns at him, before turning back to the other male - "How will you find us-"

The stranger is gone, nowhere in sight.

"Where did he go?" Magnus asks.

"I don't know," Gabriel whispers adjusting the child in his arms, "We should go, you carry Rueben."

"Rueben?"

"Bacon-I mean the piglet."

They get up on their horses, and Gabriel adjusts the baby in his arms, covering him with his cloak. The baby has gone silent; energy spent, and now sleeps soundly against the Warrior's chest. "Don't worry, we'll take care of you till your father comes back." he assures. Deep down however, some part of Gabriel realizes he might be lying.

"What's the baby's name?" Magnus asks as he tries to carry the still squirming Rueben.

Gabriel looks down at the sleeping boy and smiles, remember the stranger's whispered words.

"His name is Jesse."

Some Years Later...

A lone swordsman stands amidst the rotting corpse of a once legendary beast. Pieces of it strewn
were across the landscape, but the swordsman himself walked amongst the bulk of it. This world was so much different now since he had last been here. The monster had done a fair deal of damage, and impressive amount in fact. Nothing like he had seen in some time.

All around him carnivorous mobs feasted upon the flesh, they paid him no mind. Those foolish enough to turn their attention away soon slinked away in fear of him.

They knew better.

As he progressed through the endless grave all around him memories called out. Many from those who were absorbed and killed by the beast, some were in fear at their last moments; others had been at eerie peace.

But as more time passed, their memories too would fade from existence. Soon there would only being an echoing voice, calling out the name of the beast that nearly destroyed their home.

Witherstorm.

The swordsman however was not interested in the masses, but instead the last moments of the leviathan itself; and the power of which it possessed.

Hidden in the thickest of the desecrated goliath, a command block, the device itself was broken, and much to the swordsman's surprise; drained of its power.

Cursing in an ancient tongue far older than this world, he delved into the memory. Searching deep and hard, for whoever took the power of this beast could only be a handful of beings in the vast universe.

"A pig?" He frowned, shifting through the images. "No wait..."

He dug deeper, and his surprise increased ten-fold, "Is it truly possible?"

The memory was frozen, the last thing the Witherstorm laid it's eyes on, all of it quickly memorized. The swordsman let the memory fade from existence, no longer finding any use of it. But the warrior who had struck the beast down was now within his own memory.

His gaze turned to the distance, far away a town celebrated. He could hear the cheers, praising heroes who bravely splayed the beast. But he had no interest in the team, just their leader.

But he could wait.

Now wasn't the time anyway. The boy still had a lot to learn and grow from. Turning away from the town, the swordsman moved towards the woods. He smiled as he pulled out a glowing flint, making his path to an ancient temple. It would take time before he saw the warrior in person, but he could wait.

He did have all the time in the world after all.
A Weary Road

Present Day...

Somewhere below Sky City.

Aiden heard the group coming before he actually saw them. Sadly the ruckus didn't surprise him. It rarely ever did anymore.

It was more common than not when the group briefly returned to the world which Aiden now resided-they returned hurting and a little cranky.

"That is the last time you pick the door Ivor,"

"Don't lecture me Blondie!"

"Jesse was almost killed!"

"He's been almost killed in every blasted world we've been to!"

Aiden set down his pen and quickly rose from his desk. As was the expected and inevitable routine; he pulled the first aid kit from the kitchen cabinet, setting it down on the table just as the door knob turned.

And all of the locals kept wondering why Aiden never locked his door....

As they entered Aiden did what he did best. He surveyed the damage - physical and psychological. He never said a word, not until the group could unwind and feel safe. It was a habit he had picked up as of late, trying to see who needed what before they themselves realized what they needed.

Jesse was the first to enter, "Lukas, Ivor, can it." Jesse's expression was grim, weary. It was the same everytime, because Jesse never felt the need to press concern on himself. That's just how Jesse was.

Petra and Ivor came next, Ivor heavily leaning on Petra with one arm and the other, supported on a makeshift cane. Ivor's left foot was lifted up, wrapped up in what were probably the team's last bandages all the way to the knee.

Petra's face was scrapped and bruised, her lip split. She had a cocktail expression of relief and irritation, lined with a pinch of worry. The worry was always on her somewhere it seemed these days; on the corner of her eyes, or in a crease in her smile. Petra was strong, but was fearful of losing the group she had grown close with these past weeks.

Lukas was last; always was, it was his thing. He was tired and sported a look that said he was done with all the shit the world had to offer. One arm was wrapped in a strip of stained cloth, a long slash peaking out beneath the cotton gaps. He carried Jesse's armor with his one good arm.

Confused and realizing he missed something, Aiden looked back to Jesse. The tan male wore what looked like temple robes, gold bands with snapped chains on his wrists and ankles.

"Welcome back..." Aiden said slowly, "Any luck-

Jesse let out a disgusted noise, "No." he placed a pumpkin on the table, "Gotcha a souvenir though."

That was Jesse's latest habit. Wherever he went, if there was something slightly out of place, be it
odd, unusual, or just plain cool; Jesse brought Aiden something.

Not that Aiden minded, they made great conversation pieces.

Aiden looked at the white pumpkin with interest, "And story behind it?"

"Tell you in a bit," the other stuck out his wrists, "Got any lock picks?"

"Guest bedroom."

Jesse retreated upstairs, and Aiden sat down at the table with the others. Each was rummaging into the massive medical kit. Between the four of them and Aiden's occasional monster hunt for supplies; they went through a lot of stuff. Aiden found it best just to mass bulk on everything and put everyone's name on one of each.

Lukas was already cleaning the wound on his arm, hissing as the antiseptic bubbled on contact with the damaged skin. "He might be a tad cranky."

"What happened?"

"Jesse got captured and was going to be a sacrificed to a cult that worshiped a big ass enderman." Petra explained, placing a bandage on her lip, and another onto her eyebrow. "It was actually kinda cool looking. The thing had to at least be fifteen feet tall. The cultists worshiped it as their god."

"Damn."

"Intense as it was, I'm sure we'll laugh about it later," Lukas sighed. "We always do."

"I found it very humorous when it teleported off the cliff," Ivor hummed.

"Do you guys need to crash here tonight?"

"Could we?" the Lukas asked, "We won't take up much room..."

"Notch forbid Lukas, "Aiden shook his head, "Because I didn't build this house bigger than necessary for you guys to stay here."

"I just feel bad using all of your stuff."

"Lukas, it's cool."

Lukas smiled and went back to tending his arm, "How's the book coming?"

"Good question, I'm stuck actually. Who ran in first when Soren dressed as the Enderman attacked Jesse? I can never remember."

"It was Olivia."

"Quit selling yourself short." Jesse cut in, trotting his way down the stairs, "Lukas ran in first Aiden. Olivia ran to get help after I got hit. Lukas was the first to arrive. " He plopped down in a chair, once again sticking out his wrists, this time a pick sticking out of one of the manacles, "If you'd kindly, lock picking isn't my forte."

Aiden reached over and started picking at the lock. "So...sacrifice huh?"

Jesse grinned, "Yep, they needed a good looking male, guess I was the only - Ow!"
Lukas had lightly kicked Jesse from under the table. His tongue was sticking out; Ivor's was as well, till Petra poked a particular part of his leg, forcing his whole body to cringe. The brief happiness spread about the room crashed in an instant.

"Ow!" Ivor yelped.

"Well your leg is broken," Petra's voice cut through his curses.

"Well I know that, when will it be better?" Ivor frowned.

"It's a bad break..."

"We could get a healing potion..." Jesse suggested.

"You won't be able to," Aiden said, popping open one of Jesse's cuffs, quickly moving on to the next, "Isa and Milo are doing their best, but they still don't have a brewing stand set up yet. The town's defenses are still being built and they have main priority."

"What about Sky City," Lukas pointed, "There was that room where they stored all the loot? From the spawns remember? We could build our own..."

Aiden shook his head, "Gil and I went up last week for some supplies. The city is nearly burnt to the ground. The monsters still completely overrun the place. You can't get to the resource room with all the damage. I could try to break through but the monsters will make it hard."

A chorus of groans echoed across the room.

"Sorry Ivor," Jesse sighed, "It might take awhile."

"There is no point in going back up there," Ivor frowned, "Someone could get killed or knocked off."

"I've got painkillers upstairs," Aiden suggested.

The older male looked relieved, "That sounds lovely."

Lukas stood, "Well I'm ready to call it a night, I'll take you up there and we'll take a guest room."

The others watched the pair leave. Sitting quietly as Aiden picked away.

"I think I'm going to bed too," Petra said suddenly.

"Take my room," Aiden suggested, "I'll share the other guest room with Jesse."

"You sure?"

"Yeah, you look like you could use some you time."

The female smiled wearily, "Thanks man, I do." and with that she departed.

"That was nice of you," Jesse pointed."

"I try; don't really want to be the jerk I've built my whole life upon." Aiden popped the last wrist cuff off, "Foot."

"Well, you're doing well in my book," Jesse set his foot on the chair, eyes shifting to the window.
Moonlight illuminating the steadily growing town in the distance. "Have the people of Sky City named their new home yet?"

Aiden coughed, "Yeah, kinda tacky though."

"What is it?"

"Ground Town."

Jesse laughed, before once again going serious, "You live so far from the locals, why don't-"

"I'm good," Aiden scoffed. He popped the lock, and then waited as Jesse lifted the other leg, "They all haven't forgiven me yet. It's better for them and me to keep space. Besides, if I lived closer to town, you would have a farther walk from the portal."

"Yeah but still..."

The last cuff popped off and fell the floor in a soft thump, "Enough about me, how are you?"

Jesse slowly lowered his foot, silent.

"Jesse?"

The other male was silent for a long time, then, "Do you know how long we've been looking for home?"

"What?"

"Three months," Jesse mumbled, "We haven't stopped moving, for three months."

"You'll find it," he reached down to pick up the fallen cuffs.

"I'm scared Aiden,"

Aiden looked up sharply. Jesse sat there, looking down at his hands. They were calloused, and worn. Looking at him as a whole person, Jesse looked tired, broken even, he was cracking. "What do you mean?"

"The others look to me a lot. I keep telling them we'll get home. But..." Jesse bit his lip, "I don't know anymore. Axel and Olivia...I didn't even tell them I was going to the temple. Now I probably won't see them again."

"Stop, you will."

"How can you be sure?"

Aiden shrugged, "Maybe it's one of those things. You know, like where in the stories Notch sends a worthy team to help a city in need. Except in your case its worlds? I guess?"

"If you believe that sort of thing."

"I didn't say it was a good reason."

Jesse sighed.

Aiden sighed as well, running his fingers through his head. "Look, maybe you just have to figure out
what you're here for before you can go home."

"I'm here to get home, that's what I'm here for."

"Well maybe there is something else Jesse. You didn't give up on me, so don't give up on this."

"You were easier," Jesse huffed, but a slight smile tugged on his lips. "Thanks Aiden. I mean we both sounded really tacky, but thanks."

"My pleasure."

There was a moment of silence, the air briefly content. Jesse filled with temporary hope, and Aiden knowing that he did his job to help.

"White pumpkin, what's that things story?"

Jesse eyes lit up, "Oh you're gonna love it."

Aiden grinned. "Shoot, I'm going have to write a sequel for all your other worldly adventures."

"So it starts with this foggy cemetery, late in the evening. Lighting up the night sky are two moons..."
The New Plan

When Jesse opens his eyes, he really doesn't want to get up.
But sleep leaves him anyway, thanks to a loathsome woodpecker; and Lukas, humming in harmony.

It was the same tribal chant tune that nearly killed him forty-eight hours ago.

Jesse groans.

"Oh, good you're up."

Jesse's already burying his head beneath his pillow, "Do you really have to hum that?"

He can hear the smile in Lukas's reply, "Sorry it's catchy."

"Too soon Lukas, far too soon."

"Too soon for breakfast then?"

Jesse flips the pillow off, eying the steaming tray of food, and a mug of something warm. "Never too soon for that!"

Lukas sits down onto a nearby recliner as Jesse tears into his meal. "Don't burn your tongue."

Jesse grins mischievously, sipping from his cup, "Hot chocolate isn't that hot."

Lukas shrugs and takes a sip from his own mug.

"Besides, what better way to fight off a fall chill than with a mug of this delicious stuff?"

"Yeah," Lukas mumbles, "Hard to think that when we started from here it was almost summertime."

Jesse goes quiet, lowering his mug into the nightstand. "I'm sorry; I really thought it was the door. Our door."

"It's not your fault, we thought so too. But even though the color matched, the world didn't."

Lukas pulls out his book, flipping through his notes, "Color and make don't seem to matter. I'm mean, we found a door trimmed with hedges and the world was covered in ice. Then we went through an ice block door and it was a green flourishing world."

"Greenland and Iceland," Jesse says thoughtfully.

"That's what I labeled them." Lukas replies.

"Have you marked everyone?"

"Yeah, you think the Old Builder's would have made signs, or at least a map."

"Maybe they did and someone took them down." Jesse suggested.

"Like sabotage?"

"Maybe, how many doors have we been through so far?" Jesse lifted his mug.
Lukas flipped to the front of his journal, "We have traversed," he made a mark on the paper, "Including yesterday's adventure, One hundred and seventy-three doors."

Jesse choked on his chocolate.

Lukas sighed, "I know. I'm starting to think we're getting nowhere." Stress dripping from the edges of his voice.

Still coughing Jesse gave Lukas the best smile he could manage, "Well, you know what they say; two hundredth time's the charm."

"I don't want to go through twenty - seven more doors Jesse!" Lukas drops his book down with a heavy thud, his sudden burst was startling. "I want to go through one! This journal doesn't need to get thicker! I'm sick of introducing myself! I'm tired of nearly freezing to death, nearly burning to death, or any other means of demise! I don't want to be attacked by everything under the sun. I'm done with hurting all the time; I have more scars than teeth! I'm sick of it Jesse!"

Jesse just stared, sadly.

Lukas's anger sputtered out and he leaned down, resting his brow on his hand, "I just want to go home Jesse. And I'm sorry you didn't deserve that I-"

"It's all right," Jesse slid out of bed; he kneeled in front of Lukas, "I wanna go home too. We're all tired and we need to rely on each other. It'll work okay?"

"Okay..." Lukas laughed feebly, "Notch, I even miss Axel teasing me."

Jesse laughed.

"It's just been so difficult, with everybody on edge. Now Ivor and Petra want to split up and-"

Jesse stopped laughing at once, "Could you repeat that?"

Lukas picked up his journal. "Aiden fetched the local physician this morning while you were asleep. Ivor's busted leg is worse than we thought. Without the brewing station for a healing potion, He's going to be down for weeks at least."

"Does no one in town have a single potion?"

"Not so far, Trust me, Petra and Milo have been searching all morning." 

Jesse leaned back, running his fingers against his temple, "And Petra and Ivor want to do what?"

"Split up," Lukas explained, "Ivor stays here to recover while the three of us keep checking doors. I told them it was crazy-"

"How long is Ivor going to be recovering?"

"Mid winter at earliest."

Jesse thought on this, "Brewing stands need blaze rods right? We can only get those in the Nether. Which at the moment we don't have access to. Aiden says Sky City is infested; we could lose someone up there trying to get supplies. With winter closing in on top of it all, said supplies are going to be even harder to come by..."

"Please don't tell me you think this is a good idea."
"Unless we find a potion while traveling, I see no other way."

"Jesse, so many things can go wrong," Lukas argued, "We could get stuck in some far-off world and Ivor would have no idea what happened to us."

"But he'd be safe here." Jesse countered, "We can leave signs and markers, like we've been doing. We can check in after each world."

"Jesse-"

"And if we do find home, we know where the other door in our world is. It goes straight to Sky City; we can run through and bring Ivor back."

Lukas sighed, eyes drifting towards the ceiling, "You're set on this aren't you?"

"If you're that against it, maybe we can think of something else..."

"No you're right," Lukas replied, "We need to get home, and we can't risk hurting Ivor. We'll leave him with Aiden and keep looking."

"Ooooh Aidens gonna love that," Jesse stood, "Where are the others?"

"Aiden and Ivor are obtaining a wheelchair, Petra is milling about town."

"Sweet, I'll get dressed, and we'll secure our game plan." Jesse looked around, "Where is my armor?"

"Getting cleaned. Ivor made it indestructible, not self cleaning. Aiden has spare clothes in the trunk."

"Ah," Jesse lifted said clothes out of their storage, "This should be fun."

"Meet you in town? Or walk together?" Lukas asked.

"Just give me a sec, I'll meet you downstairs."

"It looks like you are still pretty popular,"

Jesse shifted uncomfortably as he and Lukas walked through Ground Town's square, groups of people were starting to gather, cheering and waving. All of them pining for Jesse's attention. "I don't see why you guys aren't treated like this. You were there to you know." He gave a small wave to a little girl, who squealed in delight.

"Nonsense," Lukas laughed, "You did everything by yourself."

"Lukas..."

"I'm just teasing," Lukas eyed Jesse closely, "Are you alright? You seem uncomfortable?"

"I am!"

"Is it the clothing or the people?"

"Both."

"Well what's wrong with the clothes? I can't do anything about the crowds."
"I don't know," Jesse tugged on his sleeve, "I feel exposed,"

Lukas gave a worried sigh, "You are going to have some serious PTSD issues when we get home. Look we'll hit the blacksmith's first. I'm sure they've scrubbed the blood off by this point."

Jesse never it admitted it. But he knew Lukas was right, he had spent so much time in his armor since this adventure began. It wasn't the armor he couldn't live without per say. He didn't actually wear it unless they were adventuring back at their home world. It was here that was the issue. Every strange alien world, another unknown door; nine times out of ten their group was attacked. Jesse couldn't stand the thought of being unprepared anymore. Lukas was right, when they did get home, how was he supposed to adapt to the normal again?

"I'm fine, let's just go find Petra,"

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure."

Lukas reluctantly nodded, and took the lead, weaving through the bustling square, while Jesse followed after; occasionally stopping to wave at some random passerby.

"Hey guys!" Petra called suddenly, she waved by the fountain.

Jesse and Lukas waved and quickly made their way over. Petra looked at Jesse, "So I'm guessing Lukas already fed you?"

Jesse nodded, "No food poisoning. Any luck with a potion?"

"Nope," Petra heaved a great sigh, "Milo and I checked with every citizen of Sky- Oops my bad - Ground Town. They have nothing. Milo says they probably used their last one when a guard had a bad creeper accident a week ago." Her attention turned to Lukas, "Did you tell Jesse-"

"The details to this crazy plan? Yes."

She glanced Jesse's way, "And?"

Jesse shrugged, "If we can all come to an agreement, I'm game for the plan. Lukas?"

The other male sighed and looked hard at the two, eyes shifting between the pair, "If you think it will really help-"

"We don't want to force you-" Jesse started.

Lukas held up his hand, "You aren't. I just feel uncomfortable splitting up like this. But Aiden will be keeping an eye on Ivor, so it's not like we're leaving him in the woods somewhere." Lukas sighed heavily, "We'll find home and we'll be back, I just have to keep telling myself that."

"Ahhhh! There you three are!" The trio turned to see Milo quickly approaching; the golem Jesse had given him not far behind.

According to Aiden the stone creature had been knocked off of Sky City shortly after the trio had left. It had landed in a hillside not far away, and surprisingly remained intact. It took the elated villagers over a week to dig it out; the concept of having something to protect the growing town had been an excellent motivator. Strangely however the golem only followed Milo around, which meant the poor man spent most of his time at the city wall's construction. Other golems had been built to
protect the town, but none seemed as durable as the stone behemoth, who had withstood over a dozen creeper explosions since its arrival. It eventually gained the fitting name Fortis, which meant strong.

Fortis stopped just short of Jesse, lifting his large hand to pat him on the head. A painful but sincere gesture.

Petra laughed, "It acts so strangely with you,"

Milo smiled in agreement, "Perhaps he knows you built him Jesse."

Jesse smiled slightly, flinching as Fortis continued to pat him down, "Ow! Okay big guy! Missed you too."

Fortis immediately stopped and resumed his position behind Milo. The builder hummed, curious, "It's a wonder he only listens to you Jesse."

"He listens to you..."

"Only so much, I tell him to stay and he stands still for hardly a minute."

"Golems don't stay still very long," Lukas coughed, "Trust me I know."

"Mmm, yes well," Milo brushed aside his thought. "We didn't come here to speak golems. I have good news and bad news."

"You found a healing potion?" Jesse asked.

"Sadly no," Milo answered with a shake of his head, "We've asked everyone, told them it was a matter of great importance. We all want to see you get home Jesse we really do, but I'm afraid we are without at the moment. Unless we build a brewing station or are lucky enough for a spawn to drop one; sadly I find that to be highly unlikely in the near future."

"Isa?" Petra asked.

"Dear sweet Isa and I have talked about Benedict over and over. But she says that the chicken has hardly ever hatched a Blaze egg in all the years she's known him. Even if we did give him the Eversource crown back, it is highly unlikely he'll lay a blaze egg in the near future. I'm afraid Ivor is going to have to heal the old fashion way."

"Sounds pleasant," Ivor cut in, as Aiden wheeled him up in a wheelchair.

Jesse turned to Aiden, "Are you okay with this?"

Aiden shrugged, "I've had to deal with worse. It's just me and a cranky old man while you go off adventuring. What could possibly-"

Ivor pushed the wheelchair back with his good leg, allowing the wheel to roll over Aiden's foot.

"OWWWW!" The brunette hissed, glaring hard, "You are seriously making me reconsider."

"Choose quickly," Ivor hummed.

Aiden gave Jesse a look before taking a deep breath, "Just check in often okay?"

"You never gave us the good news," Petra suddenly said.
Milo's eyes widened in surprise, "Oh did I say good news? I apologize!"

Everyone stared in silence.

Milo flushed slightly, "I'm so used to giving good news with bad I just suppose it's habit."

Jesse nodded, "Its fine Milo, what's the other news?"

"We have very little traveling supplies to give you." Milo explained, "This trip-

"It's gotta be the last," Jesse finished.

Milo looked devastated, "I'm sorry, I really am. But we have limited supplies and winter is coming soon. Isa is tearing her hair out trying to take care of the citizens. What we have left to offer is going to have to last."

Jesse placed a hand on the other's shoulder, "Its okay Milo, we shouldn't have taken so much to begin with. We'll make do with what we have, and try to bring stuff back that can help you when we visit Ivor."

The comforting statement did little to appease but Milo accepted it, "Just be careful." He looked to the others, "When will you be leaving."

"As soon as we have everything together I guess," Lukas said, "As soon as Ivor is settled in and we're sure he won't drive Aiden mad."

"What all do you need?"

"Jesse's armor is the main thing," Petra said.

"Well..." Milo let out a weak grin, "I'll go check on the blacksmith then, shall I?" He quickly departed. Fortis gave Jesse one last pat, then followed after.

Petra gave a shake of her head, "Poor guy. He wants to help so badly."

"I feel bad taking more supplies," Lukas said nervously, "We don't know how well they'll handle their first winter down here, and we keep taking stuff."

"We'll go through everything at Aiden's place," Jesse suggested, "Take only the basics. They less we take from them the better. We can always find stuff in the other worlds anyway."

The others nodded in agreement.

"Alright let's get sorted."

"Good luck man,"

"Hopefully the next time we see each other it will be with good news," Lukas grinned.

Aiden gave a firm handshake, "Maybe the book will be done by then."

Lukas gave one last smile then followed Petra through the portal door.

It had taken a few hours longer than planned, but the group was ready to go. Every member determined to make this time the last time. Isa and Milo had stopped by briefly to wish them luck, but
Aiden was the only one to actually follow them to the magical exit.

Jesse was the last one by the door. His armor once more equipped, he gave Aiden a smirk, "Glad to see you two have made up."

Aiden shrugged, pretending indifference, "Well, what can I say; there was a third party who was very persuading." A smile tugged at his lips. The cold wind picked up briefly and Aiden tugged his jacket tighter, "Just be careful okay?"

Jesse gave a quick glance towards the door, "We'll be fine. We just won't die, remember?"

"Just take care of each other you ass."

"Don't let Ivor get the best of you,"

The Blaze Rod member scoffed, "What harm can he do?"

"Witherstorm."

Aiden coughed slightly, "Well besides that. We'll be fine. Isa and Milo will help so I'm not alone on this. You better get going Petra's going to think I killed you."

Jesse stuck his foot in the door, the tingle no longer a strange sensation. Aiden stuck out his hand. "Good luck."

Jesse took it, "Thanks."

With that, Jesse slipped through the portal and departed from this world.

Aiden stood there, watching the ripples fade, "Better not die dweebs." He mumbled with a crooked grin turning and walking back to the house. "I don't want to be stuck with Ivor till death do we part."
"Alright where to this time guys?

Lukas had already pulled out his journal, unfolding the ever growing map contained inside. He placed it on the floor, smoothing out the crinkles, "Well, for starters I think we should avoid that hallway over there, we've already hit every door down there. So unless there is a hidden one, we don't need to be down there."

Jesse leaned over Lukas, "What about that one?" He asked pointing to a spot on the map.

"We've already hit that one remember?"

"We have?"

"Yeah, Petra ate that mushroom and..."

"Oh yeah, and she had that whole hallucination about Wonderland and..."

Petra let the boys continue talking as she casually made her way down the hallway, careful not the wander too far out of line of sight. They had almost lost Lukas down here already. He had stopped to lace his boots and the next thing you know...

Petra shuddered at the thought. It had taken nearly seven hours to find him again, and by that point Lukas was coming down with something. A few doors later he was sick... It resulted in multiple nightmarish days of Lukas trying not to die.

It was also the time the residents of Ground Town had fallen through.

Petra didn't blame them, not really. When they lived in Sky City sickness wasn't common. So when the Order members had come through that portal door and one of them was carrying an unknown disease...Well... It had upset Isa greatly to make that decision, but they couldn't help, not with the chance of a plague at risk.

That was probably the point Petra had started to trust Aiden again. He helped, he had pulled through. Lukas had been his best friend first after all. Between him and Petra there had been plenty of panic. Because it there was one thing Petra couldn't stand, it was someone getting sick.

Not after her wither sickness.

"Petra don't go too far!"

She turned her head to look back; Jesse stared at her, a nervous expression plastered on his face. He was thinking the exact thing Petra was thinking.

"Guys, how about here?"

Petra returned to the group and joined Jesse in leaning over Lukas. "Where?" she asked.

"Here," Lukas pointed to the corner of the map. "There is hallway up there. It dead ends so we didn't stay long. But I mapped it out. We haven't hit any of the doors up here yet."

Petra eyed the corner of the map, it was on the opposite side of their current location, and "Do we want to start so far away?"
"If you guys think we shouldn't..."

"I think it might be for the best," Jesse says, "It has got the most doors to explore and therefore a higher chance of it being our world. I know we want to make this a one door thing, but let's face it guys, the chances are a thousand to one."

"I'm game," Lukas nods.

"Alright," Petra sighs, fingers tapping the map, "Let's hit it guys."

The walk took hours, and while the Hallways of Worlds - Lukas's temporary label- was indeed impressive; it got old after the hundredth time.

"Hey Jesse, remember that one?" Petra teased, pointing at a green hued door, its border covered in glowing mushrooms.

"Isn't that the one with the bats?" Lukas asked.

Jesse made a face and walked a little faster, ignoring the laughter of the other two. After a moment however he slipped back into the group, a mischievous glint in his eyes. Petra noticed and gave him a look, "What?"

Jesse pointed, "Look familiar?"

Petra followed the finger, gaze coming to rest on a flower covered door, the inner magic ruby red. "It was not my fault they didn't allow women to wear pants Jesse!"

Jesse laughed, "They tried to burn us as witches, and all you had to do was wear a dress."

Petra elbowed him, "Well fine. If the next door requires you 'men' to wear something ridiculous, I won't be going easy on you."

Lukas walked around the corner, "Let's hope that won't be necessary," He stopped, "Here we are."

"Eww, now I know why we didn't stay here."

This part of hallway's never ending maze, was in poorer condition than the rest of the area. Stone pillars lay broken, dust and debris covered the floor, the torches had long since failed to burn. Some of the doors were cracked, their portals shut off and dormant.

It was a dark sad place.

"Notch, I hope one of these isn't it," Jesse mumbled, running his hand along the remains of a shattered door.

Petra lit a torch, "I'm sure it isn't. We just need to pick a door we can agree on."

"I'll go first," Lukas said, "We don't go through this one." Before Petra could ask why, she took a closer look at the door Lukas stood by. The door itself looked fairly normal, made from simple stone. But all around the floor by it, deep lacerations cut into the foundation, as if something had been dragged into the magical gateway, something big.

She eyed the suspicious red stains around the claw marks, "I second the notion."
Jesse hardly gave the door a two second glance, "Motion carried." He moved to an obsidian door, one with magic as black as the stone itself, "How about this one guys?"

"I don't know Jesse..." Lukas said, joining him.

"Petra..."

Jumping slightly, Petra turned around, looking towards the sudden strange noise. At the very end of the hall, of course stood a door, but this one seemed off. She looked back towards the boys. The pair was still debating over the obsidian door. Turning her focus again she moved down the hall, careful to avoid debris.

On closer inspection, the entrance was old. The frame was cracked in a few places, but everything about this door was unique. The walls around it were decorated, depicted in an art style that Petra didn't recognize. The door frame was smoothed down, each piece put together with the most dedicated of care. She looked carefully at the etchings, admiring depictions of battles, farmers, growth, and exploration... Portal light was different too. Not quite white, but not quite grey. It was soft, and warm, like a sunrise peaking over the hills.

She looked down, surprised to find footprints in the thick layers of dust. The markings were covered in a thinner layer of dirt. But someone had been here, maybe not that long ago, but someone had come.

"Petra..."

Petra looked back up at the door, leaning in slightly...

"Petra!"

Petra jumped, as Jesse joined her by the door, "Didn't you hear me?" he asked.

She stared at him blankly, "What?"

The brunette frowned, "Didn't you hear us? We were calling to you but you seemed kinda zone out."

"Oh. I was just ...looking at the door."

"Guys someone's been through here," Lukas said, he had discovered the prints.

"I was also looking at those," Petra added.

Jesse looked at the floor, "Are you sure those aren't ours and we haven't been here before?"

Lukas shook his head, "No, they're too big." He turned his attention to the door, "Wow, look at the stone work, they have everything in this door. Clay, stone, iron...It's beautiful."

Petra stared at the glowing light, "I think we should go through this one."

Jesse looked at her, "What?"

"I really think we should."

"Do you have a intuition about it or..."

"I don't think it's our door," Petra sighed, holding up her hand before the others could speak, "But I've got this feeling it will help us get home." she looked hard at the portal, "I know it sounds nuts,
but...There is something on the other side and we need to find it."

Jesse inspected her closely for a moment, and then looked at Lukas, "Lukas?"

The blonde shrugged, even though he seemed a little hesitant "If Petra thinks so..."

Jesse sighed, "Alright, this is the door." he gestured, "After you."

Petra nodded and led the way, Lukas following, Jesse last.

The hall once more, fell into silence.

Jesse didn’t open his eyes till he felt a cool breeze on his face, opening his eyes he found himself in a dim room. There were no lanterns, just two glow stones placed in the center of the room, covering the walls in a faint glow.

Petra was already inspecting the many round pillars that filled the room, "It looks kinda like a temple."

"Our door was in a temple." Jesse grinned.

"It was wasn't it?" the female smiled.

"Well whatever world we're in, this is the first one the door has still been there when we came through," Lukas points.

Jesse turned around surprised to see the portal door still behind him. This side was just as decorated as the other half, "Well that's a first."

"At least if this isn't it," Lukas said, "We can leave right away."

"Ye-ah..." Jesse replied slowly.

This was the first time the door had still been there...He wasn't sure if that should bother him or not.

"Guys come check this out!" Petra called, pulling Jesse away from his thoughts. Jesse and Lukas exchanged quick glances before hurry outside.

"Oh my Notch," Lukas gaped.

Outside the ruins doors, was a vast expanse, one like Jesse had never seen. Far as the eye could see there was something spectacular to look at: Towering canyons cliffs, covered in thick vines and topped with jungle trees; thick waterfalls falling between crevices roaring as they fell into misty lowlands. There were rolling hills and rivers weaving between the. Waters converging into swamps and vibrant green plains. Far in the distance a massive lonely mountain towered over the lowlands, smoke billowing from its peak and fog drifting down its side. Farther still beyond the solitary volcano, dark and looming were a long range of mountains stretching far and wide.

It looked untouched.

"I don't think this is home," Lukas said, "But this..."

"It's amazing!" Jesse finished.

"Yeah that's it."
Petra was grinning, "I knew there was something about that portal door, I just knew it!"

"Do you think anyone lived here?" Jesse wondered aloud.

"Had to be," the female responded, she gestured behind her, the trio turning to look at the decorative ruins, "Someone had to build this."

"It could have been the Old Builders."

"I don't think so, there is too much detail around this portal. The rest is all plain and simple. Besides," Petra turned back to the view, "Who would leave a world like this unexplored?"

Lukas was looking out as well, his expression wary as he eyed darkening clouds above, "Maybe there is a reason..."

"We got to explore it a little bit."

"Petra..."

"Oh come on Lukas, I still got a feeling about this place. Jesse?"

Jesse looked around, "Well I guess wandering around a bit couldn't hurt. It's not like we don't know where the door is."

Petra was off before the sentence was finished.

Lukas frowned.

Jesse gave him an apologetic look, "I know we need to get home, but there might be something here to help Ivor. Like temple loot or something. Just for a little bit Lukas, I promise."

That seemed to pacify him, and Lukas gave out a huff, "Alright, I'll admit it does kinda look cool."

Jesse grinned, "That's the spirit!"

Lukas just rolled his eyes and followed Petra down the remains of the temple stairs.

It didn't take long for Jesse to partially regret his decision, the stairs were all but crumbled to bits and navigating down the steep hill was difficult. Slowly but surely however they made their way down the range, inspecting buildings as they went.

"It looks like there was a whole town up here at one point," Lukas noted, he was inspecting a old square building. "I think this was a house, or maybe a shrine," he pulled out his journal, doing quick rough sketches of the wall's markings. "I wonder what these letter's mean?"

Jesse shook his head, humored by Lukas's doodling and walked into the 'house'. "They looked kind of old fashioned." Stone chairs were carved into the walls, the fabric and any cushioning it might have had now piles of dust. A broken statue was in the center of the room, the face no longer recognizable. There were a few elegant trunks in the corner, which Jesse casually kicked open.

One chest contained a set of rusted weapons and tools. The other could have possibly contained food, but it was now covered in black mold. Jesse moved away from it, and climbed up the stairs.

The upper floor was in horrible condition, walls and ceiling were gone, almost smashed clear off. Whatever was in this room there was no sign of what had been here before now. The elements had
been unkind, but surprisingly there was still a chest intact. Jesse popped it open, "Hey Lukas! There is obsidian up here!"

"Hang on to it, we might need that."

Jesse grabbed the loot and walked back downstairs and outside, Lukas was still examining the outside of the house.

"I think someone important lived here, or it was meant for someone of importance anyway."

"Why would you think that?"

Lukas finished his sketch and closed the book, "Because out of all the buildings in this area, not only is this one the most carefully built, it's the only house with actual gems in the carvings.

"What?"

"Take a look,"

Jesse leaned in, examining a carving of a warrior, he bore no armor, only a sword. He raised it high as he advanced upon a creeper. Inside the eyes of both the warrior and the creeper were colored gem stones. Even the creeper was lined with emerald.

Jesse rubbed a finger on the weather faded gemstones, "I wonder who he was?"

Lukas shrugged, "We'll never know I guess, but he was important to the people here. Oh! Maybe he's their deity..." he trailed off talking to himself, before he looked around, "Where is Petra?"

"Down the hill I think."

Lukas made a funny noise that pulled Jesse's attention away from the house, "More like down the mountain."

Jesse followed his gaze, spotting Petra in another abandoned village far away. "Wow...that was fast."

"I hate it when she doesn't that! What if she gets attacked?"

"It's Petra; she can handle pretty much everything."

Lukas just mumbled something about danger and risk.

Jesse elbowed him, "Still want to head back to the Hallway?"

Lukas was silent for a moment, looking around the ghost town, "I guess we can look around a little longer," he said with a soft smile.

Jesse grinned and together they trekked off down the mountain path.

They were wheezing by the time they made it down. Above them the higher villages and the temple had become buried in mist. Even the light rain that now fell from above did little to dissipate the fog.

Petra sat on a fallen tree, the majority embedded in a former hut.

She waved, "What took you guys so long?"

Lukas lowered himself onto a nearby damp branch, "We aren't as fast as you. We really shouldn't
split up like this."

"Relax Lukas, this isn't the Hallway. Besides, you took the long way."

Jess straightened from his feeble wheezing, "What? Did not."

Petra pointed behind him, to a set of still intact staircases embedded in the side of a cliff, the top not visible in the fog, "You took the wrong stairs."

Jesse eyed the precarious drop from the steps, "I'm good with the long way," He turned back to the ginger. "Find anything cool?"

"Some stuff, old rusted weapons and such." She pulled a small handful of cloth from her inventory, "Some old paintings too, thought you might like them Lukas."

Lukas let out a grateful gasp - still trying to get his breath back- and quickly tucked the objects into his journal.

The female's expression turned uneasy and she glanced off, "I also... found bones,"

"Sounds like- what!"

Petra frowned a bit, "I think there was a battle or something here."

Jesse looked around, "It doesn't really look like a battle happened."

Lukas shrugged, "I'm not so sure, there are a lot of metal bits lying around. They look like axe heads, hoes, pieces of swords. Something could have happened to drive people off." He looked at Petra, "You said you found bones?"

Petra nodded, "I didn't think of much at first, I thought it was some animal. But I've never seen, well, remains of people before. There is a whole bunch of them..." She jabbed her head gingerly towards the house, "I think the tree..."

Jesse walked towards the house peeking inside the window. The dim light made it difficult to see, but Jesse could make out stained bones on the floor. He could have sworn there was a skull-

"That's it," Lukas said suddenly.

Jesse jumped, unaware that the blond had joined him by the window, "Lukas! Don't scare me like that!"

Lukas stepped away, clearly not conflicted to get away from the unmarked grave, "This place is now officially creepy."

"It's fine, whatever happened here happened ages ago." Petra urged.

"Or, it's still here." Lukas argued.

"Lukas calm down, not every world we're are visiting is going to be dangerous."

"Name me one Petra."

"Well for starters..."

"Jesse."
Jesse jolted, swiftly turning around. But there was nothing behind him. There was only the edge of the ruins and the massive forest. Jesse stared at the dark trees in confusion, searching carefully for any sign of a person.

But there was none.

"Jesse."

Now he was sure he heard it. There was something in those trees. Ignoring his friends arguing and his possible better judgment, Jesse walked into the woods.

He lost sight of the village almost immediately, the overgrown trees made it difficult to see. Looking down however he spotted an old path. Much of it was covered by the forest, but he could still make out enough to stay on it.

It was eerily silent as he made his way down the trail. No birds cripped, no spawns, no animals. There was only the snap of twigs as his feet took each step, the swish of the tree branches as he pushed them aside. It was only him.

"Keep going."

Part of him knew that listening to an ominous voice- was probably a bad idea. But Petra seemed okay with it here, why shouldn't he?

The path opened up suddenly and Jesse found himself standing before a small cabin. The clearing was resting up against a rushing river, the volcano rumbling in the distance.

Jesse whistled, "Whoever lives here really has a view."

But as he approached the house, it was clear that no one no longer lived here. Grime covered the window, the ivy bush now covered an entire side of the house.

Jesse wiggled the door knob, the door easily swinging open.

As he stepped inside he took in his surroundings. For no one around, the house had held up well against the elements and other offences. A thin layer of dust covered everything, but other than that...

It was quaint, to say the least; one room one floor. There was a bed in one corner, a dinner table in another. A crafting box and furnace sat side by side. A small chair was by the furnace, indicating it was used for warmth as well. Next to that was a desk, piled high with books.

"Jesse."

Jesse looked at a desk, and moved towards it. He opened the first book at the top. It was journal, he could tell by the elegant unique print; but the written language was unfamiliar to him.

"I wonder..." Jesse flipped through quickly, but was unable to find any illustration or a readable text to help him.

_Could this place have belonged to an Old Builder?_

"Jesse!"

Jesse jolted, the book falling to the floor with a thud. The noise loud against the silent room, he looked outside.
"Jesse! Where are you?!

Jesse ran outside, "Guys! I'm- Ahhhh!" he cried out in surprise as he was drenched instantly by the rain.

It was now considerably darker outside, the rain was heavily pouring. Behind the house the river roared, little streams of water running down the hill to join the rapids. Jesse pushed aside the fact that it had gotten dark considerably quickly and started to look around the forest edge.

"Jesse!"

"I'm here guys!"

Lukas and Petra burst from the tree line, looking around before finally spotting him. Then much to Jesse's confusion they rushed at him.

"You idiot!" Petra grabbed him, shaking him, "Where have you been?!" She was soaked through, even her clothes under her armor were wet, the fabric clinging to her skin. The ginger's hair was in thick wet strips, plastered around her face as she looked at him with a worried gaze, "What were you thinking?!"

"What do you mean," Jesse argued, "I just walked down the trail while you two were arguing and-"

"Arguing?!" Jesse looked at Lukas and found him to be pale and as equally soaked as Petra. Lukas shook his head, "Jesse that was forever ago! We noticed you were gone and then we couldn't find you. We've been looking for hours."

"I've only been gone a few minutes, what the heck are you talking about?!"

"We seriously couldn't find you! The sun went down over an hour ago!" Lukas explained.

Jesse stared, shocked.

"Either you need to get a watch," Petra stopped shaking him and stepped away, "Or you better explain yourself."

"I don't know guys I swear." Jesse stammered. "It was only a few minutes..."

Petra hugged him, "We were worried sick!"

"I'm sorry!" he stressed, "I really don't know that it had been so long, I'm so sorry."

As Petra stopped hugging him and pulled away, Lukas crossed his arms, "I vote we stay together now."

"I agree. This place is getting weird." Petra says, "I mean, do you feel that?"

"Feel what?"

Petra looked around, the trees towering high above her, "Guys...this world feels...different."

Jesse and Lukas looked around, but it was the blonde who spoke up about their joint confusion, "Petra what do you mean?"

Cutting through storm; all around them the forest echoed with soft whispers. It almost seemed like a tune, a song sung through many ages. It was old, but a held a deeper meaning to it. "I don't know.
It's doesn't give me a bad vibe or anything. It just feels different."

Jesse shifted, "Let's not worry too much about it, we'll head back to the portal and-"

Through the roaring of the river and the howling of the wind, a high shrieked whistle was heard. It cut through the air like a knife.

Skeleton archer.

Jesse hadn't even pulled his sword when the first arrow struck. It glanced off his armor forcing him to stagger. The second arrow followed swiftly after, catching him in his stunned state. It slipped easily through a crack in his armor straps and embedded itself in his side.

"Augh!"

"Jesse!" Petra hurried close to him.

Jesse kneeled to the ground, dodging a third arrow, "I'm fine just kill the archer." He yanked on the arrow in his side, using his other hand to stop the blood from gushing.

"Ummm, guys," Lukas said suddenly.

They followed the direction Lukas's bow was pointing to the archer at the edge of the woods.

Petra's eyes were wide, "Is that?"

Lukas swallowed nervously, "He's riding a spider."

"I've heard about them from Ivor's tales, but I've never seen-"

The spider swiftly advanced and Lukas pulled his bow string back, "Which do I shoot first?"

Jesse tugged a little harder on the arrow, hissing as the arrowhead remained firm, "Kill the archer! We'll handle the spider when he gets here."

Lukas hit the archer right when the spider jumped, "Petra!"

The ginger lunged forward, stabbing the monster's underbelly before it could land on Lukas.

Their enemies dead they turned their attention to Jesse, Lukas kneeled down next to him ,"Are you-"

"I'm fine Lukas," Jesse said through gritted teeth, "It's just an arrow."

Lukas reached for the shaft, "It looks stuck-"

"I'll get it out."

"Let me help."

Jesse looked over Lukas's shoulder, "No time for that," he snapped the majority of the arrow shaft, leaving the rest of it embedded, "We've got more company!"

The others looked back to see - much to the trio's dismay - the entire clearing was slowly filling with monsters, all drawn out by the noise and rain.

Another spider riding archer shot an arrow, the deadly point landing not far from Lukas's foot.
"Guys back up," Petra ordered.

They rushed back, till Jesse felt icy water splashing against his legs, "I don't think this was the best plan."

Petra cursed.

"Don't worry," Jesse said, "We can handle this."

Lukas looked back at him, giving him a firm stare, "You shouldn't be fighting right now, you'll bleed to death!"

"I'm fine-"

"Lukas is right," Petra cut in, "We fight off the monsters, just lay low!"

Lukas shot a spider right as it jumped at him. "Petra! Creeper to your right!"

Petra knocked the explosive beast sideways, sending it spiraling into the river where it was swallowed by the swirling currents.

Jesse kneeled down as his friends fought, furiously trying to pull the remainder of the skeleton arrow out. The sooner he got it out the sooner he could aid his friends in fending off the spawns.

"There is too many of them! Petra what do we do?"

"We can make a break for the house!"

"We’ll be boxed in! The zombies will tear it to bits!"

"You think we'll have a better chance in the woods...:

His friends voice's became warbled. Jesse's vision started to swim; he had to squint to focus on his hands. He couldn't have lost that much blood already; could he?

An arrow landed about a foot from him and Jesse immediately noticed the familiar green dripping down the arrowhead.

"Crap, uh guys." Jesse stood, his head swirling, "Guys I think-" He struggled to find his balance, and staggered backward.

His body was enveloped in sudden coldness, and everything went dark.
"Guys, I think-"

It never ceased to amaze Lukas, that even during battle; certain sounds could be picked up almost immediately.

The splash alarmed him for the most part. *Great a spawn is in the water*, he thought grimly. If an archer had landed somehow behind them, trying to kill a bobbing pile of bones would be dangerous and difficult. He swiftly turned around, confident that Petra would cover his back while he took the river.

But then it occurred to him, this was a river. Moving currents, rushing water that sort of thing. Whatever landed in it would be bound for a ride in the rapids.

He saw Jesse's arm vanish into the black waters and his heart stopped. "Petra!"

The redhead swiftly looked back, "I'm busy!"

"Jesse!"

"What do you mean-" She stopped, realizing their third party member was gone. "Where is he?!" Her eyes widened as they shifted to the river.

Lukas looked at the ground, spotting a green tip arrow sticking out of the riverbank.

Poison.

Jesse must have been poisoned; he must have fallen in-

Sssssss.

Out of pure instinct Lukas lunged forward, Petra not far behind as a creeper let off a deadly explosion; the pair spiraled forward into the mud. Lukas grunted as he landed face first into some rocks, scraping his face. Beside him Petra groaned, clearing her head with a shake.

"Did he pull himself out?" Petra yelled, having to raise her voice to be heard over the growing roar of the storm.

Lukas looked up the banks, hoping to spot the brunette climbing out somewhere.

But there was no one.

"I don't see him, Petra I think he was poisoned!"

Vvvvpppp!

Lukas froze, staring wide eyed at the blackened feet of an enderman, "Petra don't look up."

"You think I don't know that?" she replied. "Start - Augh!"

Lukas heard a smack, and suddenly Petra crashed against him, "I told you don't look up!"

"I didn't! He just hit me!"
"Then what did you-"

The enderman shrieked and lunged at the two. The pair barely rolling away as its fists smashed into
the ground.

"Run!" Petra yelled.

"We have to find Jesse!"

"Then run along the river! Just run dammit!"

Lukas scrambled up, foot momentarily slipping into the icy river. It scared him - realizing how cold it
was- Jesse would freeze to death if he stayed in the water too long. He rushed forward trying to keep
up with Petra; looking back for the briefest of seconds at the clearing and the cabin. There were
monsters, dozens. They poured out of the tree line like piranhas swarming in for a kill.

*Oh my Notch.*

An archer raised its bow, and Lukas realized his mistake in looking back. The arrow shot across the
clearing in a matter of seconds. Lukas spotted a quick glimpse of the arrowhead glinting before it
went into his shoulder.

"Lukas!" Petra yelled, hearing him cry in pain.

"I'm fine keep going!"

They raced into the forest, black shadows making vision very difficult. Petra yanked out a torch as
they ran, lighting it as best she could under jerking movements. "Were you hit?"

Now able to see, Lukas looked at his shoulder, the shaft had broken in their escape from the clearing.
The arrow tip itself however still remained in his flesh, a quick glance revealed no deathly green, just
the dark red of his own blood, "It's not poisoned I'll be fine!"

"We have to keep following the river," Petra said, leaping over a fallen tree, "Jesse has got to turn
up- woah!"

A zombie's hand had shot out of the rotted log, grabbing hold of the female's ankle. She sprawled to
the ground, dropping the torch as she went. The torch rolled, causing the darkness around them to
swirl in freakish movements and haunting shadows.

"Petra!"

"Crap! Ow!" Petra kicked at the zombie clinging to her leg with amazing strength, "What the hell is
wrong with these spawns!"

Lukas pulled out an arrow and stabbed it into the forehead of the monster. The creature jolted, before
falling over, exploding in a puff of smoke.

"This is getting old!" the ginger snapped.

"Are you alright," Lukas asked, having to ask between gasps.

"My ankle is bruised," Petra hissed, "I won't be able to run as fast." She tried to get up, grunting in
annoyance as her ankle clearly hindered her.

"Just sit down a sec, let me look at it," Lukas pulled her down, "I've got some wraps we can give
"But Jesse-"

"I know, I know!" he stressed, hastily pulling out the bandages.

Petra shifted nervously as Lukas wrapped her foot quickly as possible, keeping an eye on the dark forest around them, "That enderman came at me Lukas, he attacked me first."

"These spawns...I've never seen anything like them," Lukas agreed, finishing the wrap. He pulled her up, "I hope Jesse's okay."

Petra put a reassuring hand on his shoulder, "He's been through worse between you and me. Don't worry we'll find him."

Lukas nodded solemnly, looking around the woods, "Then we get the hell out of here." He wrapped a supporting arm underneath the female. Then the pair quickly headed after the river.

---

His mind was in a fog, there were thousands of different voices echoing around him. They were all trying to talk to him, but there were too many, too many at once. He couldn't understand. The fog merely covered darkness; there was nothing beyond the mists. Jesse sat in the middle of this fog, dazed and confused. "What- what happened?"

He saw Aiden walk by, a tired look on his face. He opened a door that Jesse couldn't see, and sat down on something that wasn't there. "It's been too long Ivor, he's not coming back."

The older man sat across from Aiden, "It has been a year..." he said quietly, "I suppose even Jesse can't survive everything."

"Wait - guys, I'm right here," Jesse started, "I'm right-"

Aiden and Ivor vanished, leaving behind Axel and Olivia in their place. Jesse's eyes widened at the sight of them, "G-guys?"

Axel looked at him first, "Dude, what is taking you so long?"

"What do you-?"

"You left and didn't say anything," Olivia said, "And you haven't come back. Did you think we wouldn't notice?"

"I'm trying I-"

"Well, it's been like forever." Axel frowned. "We're don't have forever to wait you know?"

They started to fade, Jesse struggle to stand and get to them, but his legs wouldn't work, "Wait! Olivia! Axel!"

"Why did you leave Jesse?" Olivia asked.

Then they were gone.

"Guys!" Jesse stood briefly only to crash to the ground, "I'm trying!"
He felt this throbbing around his body, an ache, like he was pushing something away. Even though Jesse was only lying there, not even moving. The pressure eventually faded and he struggled to get back up only to collapse once more.

He lay there breathing hard, when suddenly a boot set down by his face; the thousands of voices silenced with a heavy thud of the shoe. He looked weakly up, staring at a darkened figure above him.

"You've been traveling a long time." the stranger - a male- said.

Jesse stared nothing, just stared wearily on.

"This won't be easy, but it's time." the wizened voice continued. "You need to be here."

"I need to get home," Jesse whispered.

"You will." The figure said, before he began to walk away.

"Wait! Hold on..." Jesse felt his throat go dry, "Where..." he couldn't form words anymore. He slumped to the cold ground.

He wasn't sure how long he stayed like that, when another figured appeared, kneeling down before him. A gentle hand caressed his cheek, the warmth a stark contrast to the freezing air around him, "Can you hear me? Are you alright?"

Jesse said nothing as the fog disbanded, his eyes shifting close as everything went blinding white.

"Can you hear me?"

"Jesse! Jesse where are you!?

Petra shifted her torch around, looking nervously into the dark void that was the forest, "Lukas, it's too dark now, we have to find shelter!"

Lukas adjusted his own torch, but didn't move from his spot, "We have to find Jesse!"

"You think I don't know that?" Petra snapped, stiffening slightly at the sound of a distant zombie, "We won't find him if we're dead. My ankle is twisted Lukas, and you still have an arrowhead in your shoulder. We're not going to find Jesse in the dark, and especially not like this. We need to get to cover."

"A wise opinion if you ask me."

Lukas let out an unmanly squeak and quickly dropped the torch; he pulled out his bow just as the flaming stick hit the grass. Almost simultaneously the wind died down and streaks of moonlight peaked through the trees, covering the forest in a eerie night light.

Petra yanked out her sword, "Who's there!" she demanded.

"Easy child, I mean no harm." A man limped into the torchlight, holding up one hand in surrender, the other clutching a staff. "I don't want to hurt anyone."

Petra wasn't fooled, easily spotting the sword strapped to the man's side, "Then what is with the weapon?"
"This?" the man asked in surprise, his hand patting the hilt, "A precautionary measure against those who attack me."

Petra looked the stranger up and down. He wore simple village clothes; she could recognize the style from the more primitive worlds she and the others had visited. He had a cloak tightly strapped around his shoulders, the hood pulled low over his forehead, making seeing anything above the nose difficult.

"How can you see where you're going?" Lukas asked. Petra could tell he had been observing the hood.

The other chuckled, "I know these woods well enough that my weary eyes no longer need to see as well as they used to." he rested his hands together on his staff. "Now may I ask a question, seeing as you have pelted me with many?"

Lukas and Petra exchanged glances before Petra reluctantly turned to look at the intruder, "Yes,"

"What are two kids like you doing in the middle of the woods? Especially in the middle of night during a storm like this?"

"We're looking for our friend," Lukas explained, "We've lost him and he's probably hurt."

"Lukas." Petra warned.

The older male looked surprised, "Lost? In these woods that can be a very bad thing. There are many dangers in these forests." he said, cutting her off.

"We can handle the spawns, don't worry," Petra said.

The other frowned in disapproval, "There are worse things than Creepers and Zombies child."

Lukas looked uneasily at Petra, "Like what, Enderman?"

"Even worse than those..." he replied, "These trees are old son, they've been here since the very beginning. Ancient things house powerful secrets. Foolish people shouldn't wander about so carelessly, don't you agree?"

It sounded almost like a teacher lecturing a child.

Lukas's' eyes shifted between Petra and the stranger, silently begging Petra for assistance, "Uhhh..."

Petra crossed her arms, "Look, not to be frank. But who the heck are you? And what do you want?"

The man bowed, "I am Elder Brine, and I've come to see if you needed assistance. From what I've learned it seems you do."

"Thank... You?" Petra said slowly.

"And you are?"

"I'm..." she paused, looking at her partner. He nodded, in encouragement, "I'm Petra and this is Lukas. Our missing friend is Jesse."

"Jesse?"

"Yes," Lukas confirmed, "We lost him by that old cabin-"
"By the river?" Brine cut in.

"Yes. He fell in the river."

"I see..." Brine said, he pointed a certain direction through the trees, "Well then let me assist you in locating him. I can keep looking along the river path in case he washed up somewhere near here, I know these woods. But if your friend did fall in the river rapids; your best chance is he will come out in the river basin on the other side of those hills. There is a lake there, not far from a village."

Petra squinted, hardly able to see said rolling hills, "Those things are huge! It will take forever to get up there with these trees."

"Not necessarily, most take the far path, which goes the long way around till the hills and forest subside. But if you stay close to the river, and I mean close; the river cuts right through those hills. The trees grow right up to the banks, and it is difficult to traverse, but much faster than the main road."

Petra grabbed the torch and started to move, "Lukas let's go!"

Lukas turned to Brine, "Thank you so much for this- we owe you big time."

"If you find your Jesse let me know," Brine replied.

"What if you find him instead of us?"

Brine smiled, turning away from the torch and entering the dark woods, "Then I'll find you," he said, vanishing into the shadows.

"That's a little creepy." Lukas said to Petra.

"I know, it might be too good to be true," Petra frowned, "But it's our best bet. You keep your bow out, I'll hold the torch."

"What about your earlier plan? What about the storm?"

"Look it's already clearing!" Petra pointed, "We have a chance, now let's go!"

Together they raced off down the river.

Jesse awoke with a start. His entire body felt like it was on fire but at the same time he was pretty sure he was freezing to death,"Guys!"

His sudden movement sent him spiraling out of a bed; he crashed to the floor with a heavy thud. Agony shot through his body and he cried out.

He was in a strange bed, in a strange house, in a strange world. His whole body was overwhelmed in waves of pain, and he couldn't think straight. In his book that was never a good thing.

There was crash outside the bedroom, the sound of glass shattering. Someone was here.

The bedroom door opened and an older woman rushed in, she looked at him alarmed, "Hold on a sec! Calm down!"

There was a knife in her hand. That was not helping.
Jesse was in a panic, he scrambled back struggling to get purchase on the hardwood floor. His hand crashed against a desk, fingers scrambling for support. They wrapped around something cool and metallic. He yanked it off the desk, barely pausing to look at the letter opener. He brandished it like a knife, "Get away from me!" he cried.

The woman calmly moved towards him,"I'm trying to help you, you need to relax. You'll tear your stitches open if you aren't careful."

"Put your weapon down first!"

"Weapon?! What-" She looked at the knife, "Oh-" she laughed a bit, "I'm not going to hurt you-"

"Put. It. Down." Jesse repeated, stating each word slowly and commanding like a human to a dog. "I will not be eaten."

She looked at him funny, confused probably at the sound of a much younger person telling her what to do. But she relented; setting the knife down on the ground, kicking it out of the bedroom and out of reach. She lifted her hands up, eyebrows tilted slightly, "There. Happy?"

Jesse said nothing, just sat there breathing heavily. He struggled to stay focused, he needed to find Petra and Lukas, and get the hell out of here. Find Petra and Lukas and get the hell out-Crap, he's repeating himself! He cringed as a particular breath send needles through his body. His whole body twitched and jerked with spasms, wanting badly to curl up in pain.

"Can I help you please?"

He lifted the letter opener back up, "No you may not, I need to figure out...Figure out..." He trailed off.

"You're not thinking straight."

"Yes I am."

"You just told me you didn't want to be eaten." she frowned, kneeling down.

Jesse squinted. Had he really said that? He didn't remember..."Look I'm just trying to -"

"Figure things out," she finished, "Don't worry I get it." she slowly extended her hand, "Can you give me the letter opener?"

Jesse didn't.

She sighed, a loose strand of carrot red hair falling from her bun and into her face. She blew it away with a puff. "Can I at least stitch you up?"

"If I can't have the letter opener, you can't have a needle."

"Fine," She crossed her arms, sitting back on her heels; eyes glinting with humor, "I'll just wait here till you pass out from blood loss."

"Blood-" Jesse briefly glanced down, the bandages around his ribs were quickly staining red. "Loss? Crap..."

"Tell you what. I'll let you keep the letter opener, if you let me put you back on the bed, so I can stitch you up." She bargained, "And if I try anything funny, you can stab me with that paper cutter of yours."
"How do I know I can trust you?"

"I'm a doctor, does that help?"

"Oh..."Some small part of his brain that contained what little ration he had left told him this was bad idea. She could easily knock his defense weapon away if she tried. But Jesse at the moment was not rational by majority. "Alright fine."

The female smiled, and slowly moved forward. She was careful not to give him any reason for alarm. She gently lifted him up, and set him on the bed. "I'm gonna need scissors to cut-"

Jesse with one swift swipe cut the bandages with his letter opener - a feat he realized was pretty cool, considering he could barely stand.

The woman stared, before getting up from the bed, "Of course." she said, shuffling through a dresser against the wall.

As she rummaged, Jesse cautiously looked around the bedroom, taking in the rustic but beautiful look of the place. Solid oak wood, quartz lights, large sturdy furniture, a set of sharp swords on the wall-

Wait.

The bed dipped and Jesse jerked forward once more, brandishing his deadly weapon.

"Would you stop lurching around like that!" the woman said, throwing her hands in the air exasperated. The blade rested on the tip of her nose, "You're going to kill yourself!"

Jesse eyed the thread and needle, and slowly pulled the letter opener away.

"Thank you," she reached down, dipping her fingers in a jar resting on her lap. Her hand came up, fingers coated in a white substance that smelled putrid, "Hold still-"

Jesse stopped her, "What is that?"

She stared at him with a blank expression, "Pain killer. Unless you want me to do the stitching without it?"

Jesse quickly removed his hand.

"By Notch," she mumbled, "You're as bad as my husband was."

"What happened to your husband?"

"I ate him." the female answered dryly.

"What!"

She grabbed his shoulder before he could pulled away, "Hold still, I was only kidding! I won't joke anymore, you clearly can't take a breath. Notch Almighty, you are wound up tighter than a dispenser coil."

"That won't be going away anytime soon." he warned.

"Clearly." She ran her fingers slathering the pain salve along his arrow wound, pulling out the broken stitch string as she went, making him hiss in pain.
"I thought this was a pain killer?" he asked.

"Give it a sec."

She ran her fingers over a second time, adding a second layer. Much to Jesse's surprise, he felt little. "Feel it that time?"

"...No."

"Good," then faster than he could blink, the stranger pushed the needle through his skin, sewing like she had done it a thousand times before.

"Huh, you just might be a doctor."

"Told you."

She finished sewing, grabbed the letter opener, cut the stray string and had the blade back in his fingers before he could react.

"Hey!"

She got off the bed ignoring his irritation, "Just don't move around too much."

"No promises," he said, leaning against the head board, eyeing the open bedroom door.

She glanced at the door then back at him, "You can try, but honey, you won't be able to walk far."

"How do you know?"

She pointed at him legs, and Jesse looked down. From ankle to knee he was bandaged up. "What did you do?"

"I found you half dead young man." she argued. "I cleaned you up, all the damage done was by what you did, not me." She rubbed her fingers between her brow, "Look, I really am just trying to help you I really am. I get it, you are scared, you're confused. The drugs in your system are probably not helping."

"You drugged me?"

"To ease the pain."

Jesse went silent. With the pain In his ribs numbed down, suddenly it wasn't so hard to think anymore.

She sat down on a recliner chair, "So how about we start over? I really am helping you sweetheart. I don't know how I can show you, but I guess you are going to have to trust me."

Jesse stared hard at the stranger before him, carefully thinking his next words, "Alright, I accept you don't want to kill me. You probably don't want to eat me either." he placed the letter opener down on the nightstand, hands shaking. " I was just startled. I never really act like this..."

She nodded in understanding, "I understand, I would have been scared too."

Jesse twisted the sheet between his fingers, "So starting over?"

"How about we start with names?"
"I'm..." he paused, "I'm Jesse."

Her smile was beautiful as she lit up to his response, "What a lovely name. Jesse...It suits you." she extended her hand and Jesse took it, her hand soft and warm, "Pleased to meet you Jesse."

"Thank you...Can I get yours?"

"Of course," the female paused as she took a second to take her lose hair and tuck it back into the messy bun.

"And it is?"

It was then Jesse noticed her eyes sparkled, almost like diamonds in torch light. She smiled at him, and Jesse couldn't help but think, she was beautiful.

"My name is Alex."
"My name is Alex."

"Alex, I like it." Jesse said

Alex smiled brightly, "Thank you, I'm rather fond of it myself." She stood, "But before we get anymore acquainted Jesse, I'd like to finish tending your wound. If you're comfortable with that?"

He ran his fingers gingerly over the exposed flesh, "I guess we should huh?"

"Yes it's probably best."

Jesse leaned against the headboard as Alex fetched wrappings from her cabinet.

"Do you have everything in there?" he asked with a weak chuckle as she sat down on the bed.

"Everything but the kitchen sink," was her witty reply, then, "I am a doctor Jesse."

"But you do it here - I mean, treat your patients- in your house?"

"Where else would I do it?"

"I don't know," he suggested, "Maybe a hospital?"

Alex stopped peeling back the ruined bandages from his body and stared, "Pardon?"

"Oh never mind," Jesse replied quickly. It was probably best not to talk about other worldly things with a stranger he decided.

She finished pulled the bloody rags off and set to work spreading a slick substance on his wound. Jesse hissed as a sharp pain cut through the current numbing agent.

"Disinfectant," Alex said before he could ask.

"Do you not have healing potions?" he asked slowly.

"Used to,"

He took a mental note on her answer, "Don't you have a brewing stand then?"

"I did," she frowned, "But my dear husband crushed it by accident three months ago."

"They are made of metal, how did he manage that?"

"He was building a golem for the village and it hit the wrong target during its test run. He hasn't fixed it yet, even though I keep reminding him." she placed a clean pad on the broken skin, before beginning to wrap the bandages around his ribs, "I would have used a healing potion for you sweetheart. But our village suffered a bad mudslide in the lower range. I used the last I had on the locals."

Just my luck, Jesse thought, then aloud, "Well it's not like you knew I'd be hurt." he looked out
around, "It's pretty quiet here for being a village..."

"We're not in town. My husband and I live on the outskirts. We prefer our privacy."

"Ah."

Alex was silent for the rest of her tending, occasionally muttering reminders to herself about medical treatment, when, "Are you hungry?" she asked, finishing her wrapping.

Jesse felt his stomach twist, "I'm not sure that's a good idea. I don't think my innards are very agreeable right now."

"I thought that might be the case." Alex tilted her head, "I have a stew in the cauldron right now. I made it in case you're stomach was queasy. It has some special herbs in it, they should help ease the discomfort. But I won't force you to have any."

"Herbs?"

"Nothing to drug you with, I swear on my grave."

Jesse thought about it, his nose catching a whiff of the stew in the other room. "Maybe...just a small bowl?"

"Small bowl coming up." she got up, patting him gently on the shoulder, then left the bedroom. Jesse watched her leave, noticing her rubbing her nose.

"Alex?"

"What kiddo?"

Jesse felt his face flush,"Sorry if I hurt you anywhere with the letter opener. I was kinda going crazy back there."

She laughed from the other room, "Nothing but a scratch on the nose sweetheart."

"I'm sorry!"

"Its fine, it will heal in a day or two. Besides," she replied, "I've had worse," she returned to the bedroom carrying two steaming wooden blows. She handed one to Jesse, "My husband has done far worse than you - careful it's hot."

"Thanks," Jesse gratefully took the bowl. It smelled heavenly up close, and looked delicious. It was a nice change after three months of a limited diet. He lifted a spoonful blowing slowly on it, "What did he do?"

Alex sat down once more in the recliner, "He was poisoned by a witch once. It sent him into a hallucinogenic state. I was trying to patch him up," she laughed, "And he stabbed me in the thigh with that same letter opener. It was almost ironic when you armed yourself with it. I really should put that thing elsewhere."

He nearly dropped his stew, "Seriously?! What did you do when he stabbed you?"

"Oh I wrestled him down; it didn't take too long."

Jesse glanced at the letter opener, and then back at the ginger, happily eating her meal, "Something tells me you wouldn't have had an issue disabling me."
"Oh it would have been a piece of cake. I've had lots of practice." Alex blew on her stew, "But I decided I didn't want to make you distrust me anymore than you already were. Bad first impression and all that jazz."

"I appreciate the thought."

"No problem."

They ate in silence for awhile. Alex had been correct on her hunch. Her cooking was delicious, and whatever herb she had mixed in eased his stomach greatly. That alone put him more at ease.

"So," Alex chirped up, "Want to tell me why I had to pry an arrow out of your ribcage."

"I was out in the woods when I was hit by an archer."

"Of course, arrows and archers are usually a pair." Her tone wasn't mocking, merely cheerful. She was doing her best to ease what little tension remained.

"They're usually not a problem," Jesse said, embarrassed, "I mean, I'm not an exceptional fighter, but I can at least dodge. This skeleton, he was a good shot, better then I've seen on an skeleton archer. That, and he rode a spider. I've heard of them doing that, but I've never actually seen one."

"We call them Spider Jockeys," Alex said, "Pain in the ass if you ask me. They're pretty common here. I'm surprised you haven't seen one sooner."

She was curious, trying to figure out where he was from Jesse could tell. It probably didn't help he had mentioned a hospital earlier. He wasn't bothered by her prying for some oddly enough, but he dodged the statement for safety reasons. Last place the team had been to called him and his friends insane and tried to have them locked away. "Yeah well, he hit me," Jesse continued. "Then more spawns showed up, it's harder to remember what happened after I was shot, but my friends-"

Alex raised an eyebrow when he stopped, "Jesse?"

"Oh my Notch! Petra and Lukas!" Jesse quickly set his bowl down, "I've got to find them!"

"Don't tear your stitches!"

"They are still out there," Jesse argued, "Who knows how long they've been looking! They might be hurt!"

Alex firmly pushed him down into the bed, "We'll find them Jesse,"

"But you don't know where they are," He countered.

Alex remained stoic, arms gently pushing him down, "Jesse I found you in the river. You're friends are probably upstream,"

"The river?"

"Yes, that's why the rest of your body is so damaged; you took a tumble through the rapids. You probably fell in after you were poisoned." she explained, "Now I'm no detective, but if your friends are smart they'll follow that river downstream, hoping to find you washed up somewhere."

"That could have been days ago,"

"I found you the middle of last night Jesse, it's only late afternoon now, they haven't even been lost a
whole day."

Jesse shifted uncomfortably, "I still need to get to them."

Alex smiled, tugging at a glinting charm necklace around her throat, "Don't worry, my husband is out there right now. He headed up the river a day ago. As long as your friends stayed close to the water, he'll probably run into them."

Jesse leaned back uneasily, "I hope so..."

He watched Alex look out the window, staring with great discomfort towards a large set of rolling hills covered in trees. "I hope so too..."

Lukas groaned as another branch slapped him in the face, "Gah! If Jesse isn't dead when we find him, I'm gonna kill him for wandering off."

"I'll let him know how upset you were after we lost him, I'm sure he'll be flattered."

"Shut it Petra."

It had been a long night and even though Lukas and Petra were still worried to death about Jesse; the lack of sleep and the constant fear for their own safety hovering over their heads make it difficult to be in a agreeable mood.

Petra let out a humored grunt and hacked away another tree branch, "Man when Brine said the trees grew close, he didn't say they grew that close."

"I can't even see the river," Lukas frowned.

Brine had been correct, the river cut right through the thick forests and the hill on which they were mounted. But he might have understated how thick the trees really were. The trees weren't particularly tall, but they were thick and branchy and didn't even produce leaves. Their roots grew right up the riverbank, even spreading across and tangling with other trees on the opposite side. Lukas desperately hoped Jesse wasn't tangled in those roots somewhere...submerged under the water...

"It's okay Lukas," Petra said, as if sensing his worry, "We'll find him."

"I know..." he quietly replied.

There was a thick fog as well, and Petra and Lukas had lost sight of the river some time ago, going solely off of sound. They didn't have to worry about wandering too far however, the river cut through the forest like a thin knife, leaving tall rocky cliffs on either side. They knew when they hit rock face they had wandered too far.

Petra slapped a bundle of wispy white out of her face, "Sure are a lot of cobwebs around here."

She was right, the more they traversed the thicker the webs became, to the point where fog and cobweb were hard to tell apart.

A particular branch snagged Lukas's short hair just so and his head lurched back, "Ow! I'm starting to think going the long way -ouch!- would have been faster."

"We can't back out now, it will take to long." Petra said, "Just don't -damn tree -wander too far okay? I can barely see my hand much less you."
"I won't, trust me. So far no good has come from wandering off around here."

"I think I see the river," Petra pointed, she stepped ahead of him, "Follow me."

Lukas only made it a few feet when his foot snagged on a branch, he landed on the tangled roots with a heavy thump. The jarring motion sent his wounded shoulder screaming in pain. Lukas reached back onto his shoulder blade. With all that running from spawns and meeting Brine, he had completely forgotten to take the arrowhead out. He felt rather stupid for leaving it in so long. He quickly pulled it out, gritting his teeth in pain and threw the blasted piece of flint into the fog.

There was a hiss.

"Um Petra?" he froze, "Did you hear that?"

Petra didn't respond.

Lukas stood, "Petra?" he called.

Nothing.

Fighting down panic he tried again, "PETRA!"

"Lukas? Where are you?"

He let out a sigh of relief, "I fell, I think I'm somewhere behind you? Where are you?"

"I'm by the river!" she called back.

Lukas stepped forward, struggling to make his way through the thick forest. He couldn't hear the river over the cracking of branches and bark. No matter how slow he tried to traverse something always made a noise.

"I can't hear the river! Keep shouting so I can get my bearings!"

"Marco!" she replied wittily.

He couldn't help but smile and adjusted his direction to the sound, "Keep going!"

"Okay! Polo!"

Another hiss.

Lukas froze, "Petra?"

"What?"

"I think there is something here..."

"Not funny Lukas."

He moved forward, "No I'm serious. I keep hearing things."

"Just keep following my voice!"

"I'm trying I just- WOAH!"

Lukas cursed as he tumbled from the weak ledge. In the fog he had failed to see the path had ended.
He fell down, rock and gravel following after as he landed hard on a messy pile of webs and branches, keeping him suspended a few feet off the ground. The thicker cables of the web twanged and vibrated with every rock and twig that hit them.

Panic set in immediately, and Lukas struggled to get out of the sticky substance. But more and more of it seemed to appear as he moved.

Petra was calling out, "Lukas?! Lukas what happened? Answer me!"

He was trying, but the webs where in face. He thrashed about as violently as he could. But the sticky substance was everywhere, his mouth, his eyes-

"Lukas where are you?!"

There was another sharp hiss and branches cracked up above him, sending small pieces of wood and bark sprinkling all around him. The entire tree bent down slightly. Tearing off the webs from his face, Lukas managed to turn around looking sharply up. The only thing he could see above him was eight beady red eyes, and dripping fangs.

The monster hissed, venomous saliva dropping down and splattered onto his cheek.

"PETRA!"

"Lukas?!"

The spider screeched, and leapt down, fangs wide open for a deadly bite. Screaming his lungs off more or less, Lukas managed to lurch his body sideways. The creature landed heavily on top, but its jaws missed his throat. It bit down, not yet realizing it had missed its intended target. The sharp fangs cut through one of the webs support cables, sending the whole trap tilting.

With the combined weight of Lukas and the spider and with one support no longer in place. The pair tumbled out of the tree falling the last few feet to the ground in a tangled mess. The arachnid landed on its back, Lukas on its underbelly.

"Lukas!"

"Spiders!" Was all he managed to cry out as the beast screeched in rage. It started snapping at him, trying to get turned over.

Lukas managed to get off the lethal mess of eight legs and scrambled away; darting across a small clearing as he drew his sword.

There was a wet sticky sound and Lukas's foot was yanked out from under him. He fell forward, chin slamming first into the hard cold ground. His sword clattered away, landing a few feet to his left.

Lukas looked down at his foot. The spider had righted itself, shooting great lengths of spring from its spinner. His legs were quickly bound together in thick tangle of wet web. "NO! NO! NO!"

Content that its prey would not be getting away, the monster charged leaping high in the air.

"PETRA HURRY!" Lukas turned forward again and lunged for his sword, fingers grabbing hold of the hilt. He twisted round, blade up.

The spider landed meekly at his feet, whimpering.
He froze, eyeing the blade the then the spider.

Was it afraid of it?

"Get back!" he yelled, swinging the iron blade.

The spider hissed, almost like in defiance.

"I said get-"

A deep guttural roar echoed the forest from somewhere behind him.

Lukas and the spider went stiff the later backing away quickly into the woods, and disappearing into the trees. Still stuck on his back, Lukas slowly tilted his head back.

Behind him, from what he could make out in his upside down perspective was a deep dark cave. One long thick black tree was protruding out from the depths.

But then the tree moved.

Lukas paled.

One after the other more ‘trees' exited the cave, followed by a round massive body.

So it wasn't the sword the spider was afraid of.

It was the bigger spider.

The beast hissed, clicking it’s pinchers together as it stepped out into the opening. It eyed Lukas, tilting it's head back in forth with curiosity. Then it crouched and with a snarl quickly scurried forward.

"Petra!"

There was a swish of a sword and Lukas's legs broke free. He looked forward, "Petra watch out for the-"

It wasn't Petra.

A much older male, with brunette hair and a matching facial hair leaned over him, diamond sword in hand. Before Lukas could utter a single word, the man shoved him hard, "Move!"

Lukas rolled from the force of the push, the stranger diving after him just as the monstrous spider brought it's stinger down into the dirt. The stinger was thicker than the stranger's blade, embedding deep into the ground and tearing through roots and dirt. The spider screeched in fury, not pleased to have its prey released.

"Up! Up!"

The man yanked Lukas up, but didn't move out from underneath the eight legged beast. "We have to stay under it, it can't get us as well under here." he ordered.

The spider was furious; fully aware that the pair was below it's under belly. It moved every direction possible, jabbing its stinger various times. But the stranger moved about underneath like it was dance. He kept a firm grip on Lukas's arm, making sure he stayed out of the way.
Suddenly, "Keep your friend back," the brunette practically threw Lukas out from underneath the belly of the beast. Lukas stumbled crashing into Petra just as she entered the clearing, sending them both tumbling to the ground.

"Lukas! What is - What the holy heck?" Petra gaped at the massive beast.

Lukas yanked her up, "Spider."

"I know it's a spider but why the hell is it so big?!"

"I don't know it-"

The spider screeched, once more gaining their attention. The creature had spotted the strangers cloak, tucked into the trees. It leapt, flying across the clearing and bit down onto the man.

"No!" Lukas cried, running to help.

He slid to a stop however as the spider pulled away from the smashed trees, cloak in its jaws. There was no person attached.

*He's gone?* Lukas thought.

The spider turned around, unable to spit out the cape, the cloth stuck between its mandibles. It looked this way and that, aware that it didn't catch it's prey but unable to locate him. It spotted Lukas, and lowered itself to the ground, not wanting him to run under the belly. The spider slowly crept forward, careful in it's advance.

"Lukas..." Petra said slowly.

Lukas backed away, "Petra, ru-"

"Hyahh!"

Leaping down from the rock face above, the stranger flew down, diamond blade glinting against the white fog. He landed on the spider, locking his legs around the beast's head. The spider roared and went into a frenzy; slamming into trees, rocks, anything to get the human off its back. But the man held on with relative ease, he raised his sword high, and then slammed it all the way down into the spider's skull. The creature froze, and then stumbled to the ground twitching. The male jumping off gracefully before it hit the dirt.

He calmly put his sword away, ignoring Lukas's and Petra's wide eyed stares. He dusted off his hands, "Well that was fun." he patted the corpse, "Serves you right big guy."

"What- how did-" Lukas started.

Paying Lukas no mind, the man turned away and reached into the mouth of the dead behemoth, and unhooked his cloak. "Hmmm," he frowned at the tears, "Gonna have to fix that."

"How did you-"

He moved around the spider, making his way to a wrapped up corpse of something unknown. He stuck his arm in, making a face as he pulled out a destroyed fishing pole, "That was my best one!"

"Are you even listening?!" Lukas frowned.

"Hmm?" He looked over surprised, "Oh you're still here? Weird, people usually run by this point."
"You saved my life. Besides you could have needed help."

"You're welcome, but I can handle myself."

Lukas walked forwards, "How did you even manage to trick it like that? I didn't even see-"

"It's not hard. Just be faster than the spider." the other explained, "Now for the real question. What are two kids like you doing here? You should know better." He had a stern expression on his face, like a father lecturing his youth. Lukas found himself to be rather uncomfortable by it.

"Well, we um," Lukas looked nervously at Petra.

"We were following the river," Petra said.

"Take the path next time," the man replied, "It comes out there other side. No need to walk into the biggest spider's nest this side of Mt. Incendia."

"We didn't know-" Lukas explained.

"How could you not? Are you not from around here?"

"No," Petra replied slowly.

"Then where?"

"Oh, there other side of the mountain range" Petra said even slower.

The stranger raised an eyebrow, suspicious, "Everyone knows this place is a deathtrap-"

"We lost our friend in the river," Lukas blurted. "He's hurt, and we couldn't find him and -"

"Wait hold up. What?"

"He's poisoned he could be dying! He fell in the rapids up river."

The stranger paused, processing this new information, "Why didn't you say so?"

"You didn't give us the chance," Petra snapped.

He crossed his arms, "Well in that case, your friend is probably up in the watering hole."

"But he could be stuck here-"

"He won't be," the male cut in, "The rapids temporarily break off from the bulk of the river, they cut through a cave system. No way your friend could have missed that, those currents could push a golem if they wanted. He'll definitely wash up in the watering hole. I'll show you where it's at-"

"Hold up!" Petra held up her hands, "Look, I know you saved Lukas here. But we don't even know you!" Obviously Petra was pissed, considering the last stranger had given them lethal directions.

That didn't seem to bother the male, he briefly bowed, and "My name is Steve. There now we're acquainted. Now we need to hurry, the water hole is a hot spot for predators, don't want them to munch on your pal do we?"

Lukas crossed his arms, "Wait -"

"Hate to interrupt you kid, but we need to move now, before the big one shows up." Steve quickly
put on his cloak.

"That wasn't the big one?!" Petra asked alarmed.

"Pfft," he rolled his eyes, "No, Mom's way bigger."

As if on cue the cave vibrated with an ear splitting roar.

Lukas quickly looked to Steve, "Lead the way."

Steve took the lead, jogging only slightly, like he knew already about Petra's limp, "I don't believe I caught your names?"

"You didn't give us a chance for that," Lukas replied. "But I'm Lukas, and this is Petra."

"You really like to ask a lot of questions don't you?" Petra asked

Steve laughed, a merry look in his eyes despite the hazardous situation, "What can I say, I was born full of wonder."

Then he led them ahead, into the white fog, and into unknown.

---

Chapter End Notes

Fanart Belongs to https://sometimesyoujustwannadance.tumblr.com/ also known as wavingaswepass from tumblr.

Thank you so much for the fanart I love it!!!!
"You didn't exactly explain why you were up in the spider's nest?" Petra asked.

Steve was kneeling down at her feet, inspecting her sprain. "Didn't have time I suppose."

True to his words, Steve had led Lukas and Petra out of the spider's lair. It was a relief to be out of the foggy nightmare. Once they broke out of the dead ravine, the forest opened up into large quiet redwoods. There had been a cave on the other side, where the weakening rapids joined the rest of the river down a straight and calm path.

Jesse would have come through here.

Steve made them stop shortly after escaping the nest, despite their objections. He checked to make sure Lukas hadn't been poisoned, but the blonde merely suffered scrapes and bruises. Steve had quickly put some antiseptic on his arrow wound and gave Lukas a bandage to patch with. He now kneeled on mossy ground, reinforcing Petra's wrapped foot with splint.

"I was down here fishing," Steve explained, "When a spider stole my fish and my pole. I chased into the nest, but that big guy back there beat me to it. I was waiting for it to go back into its cave for a nap, when your friend over here came tumbling in."

Petra noticed Lukas flush.

"Did you seriously not know that was a nest? The Perpes River has been their home for centuries."

Petra twisted her fingers into the grass, "We've...never been here before."

"So you said you were from the other side of Adamans?"

Lukas froze, and Petra hesitated.

Clearly suspicious by their lack of answer, but very patient all the same; Steve jabbed his head, "The mountain range?"

"Yes." Petra quickly replied.

"Interesting, what brings you over here?" he finished his work and leaned back on his heels.

"Um-"

"Adventure," Lukas cut in, "To explore the unknown."

Steve let out a soft smile, for a moment there was a longing look in his eyes. "I guess I can't blame you there. But you need to be careful, you're down a person, and you both could have been seriously hurt."

"We got lost," Petra replied, "These woods got us all turned around."

"Well, we'll find your friend; we'll get you all rested and patched up. Then I'll get you in the right direction home."

I wish, Petra thought.
Steve stood, brushing dirt and moss off of his pants. "Ready?"

Petra and Lukas nodded eager to get back on the move in their search for Jesse.

Steve whistled a sharp high pitch note. It echoed through the woods, vibrating off of the tall trees. Just as it faded a large horse trotted into the clearing, followed by a second. Steve grabbed the reigns of the second horse and led it over to Petra and Lukas,"Up we go!"

Petra stared at the horse. Like the spider from earlier, it was massive compared to the ones Petra was used to seeing.

"I think something ate your horses," Lukas stated equally dumfounded..

Steve snorted, "They're Clydesdales. They're supposed to be big. Meet Gaea and Titan. Gaea will be your ride," He turned to Petra, "Can you get up with your foot?"

Petra stood, "Of course." She hoisted herself up, only to get halfway, "Or maybe not."

Lukas shoved her up the rest of the way, before Petra had to pull him up herself. She looked to Steve, the male adjusting the packs on the back of his horse. Clearly the other had been using Titan for the pack horse on his little hunting trip. He moved some bags aside, and tied his fishing bag on.

"Can you get on?" Petra asked.

Steve hooked one foot on the saddle, and easily swung up, "Of course," he replied. He moved Titan in front of Gaea, grabbing her reins and holding them tight.

"Don't trust us with the driving?" Lukas asked.

" We need to go fast, and I know these woods a bit better than you don't you think?" Steve made a funny click with his teeth and the horse immediately broke into a gallop. Steve only held onto Gaea's reins for about a hundred feet, then let go. The female continued following her male partner like a shadow.

The ride was exhilarating and intense. Steve rode the horses through tight curves, high jumps, low trees. The Clydesdales stayed true in all of their footing. Not even pausing or slowing down to turn and adjust. Titan leapt over a creeper at one point, not even alarmed by the creature.

Lukas was holding on tightly to Petra's waste, breath hitching with each dangerous move. Petra herself was gripping Gaea's mane. Only Steve remained calm and sure atop the enormous mounts.

I guess if anyone trusted these horses, he would. Petra concluded.

She felt only felt slightly uncomfortable following Steve through the woods. Something about him put her at relative ease. This was saying a lot, considering Brine had sent them into a death trap. Brine had been old, nothing too intimidating about him, save for his sword. But why had he pointed to the nest?

"Oh sweet creepers tell me we're close," Lukas suddenly, pulling her from her thoughts.

From the corner of her eye she saw a hoard of zombies, the horses bolting by without even the slightest hesitation. One zombie was even unfortunate enough to end up underneath the powerful legs of the beasts, and still they moved on.

"Steve!" Petra called.
He glanced back, the motion making Petra a little uneasy since he no longer was watching where he was going. "What is it?"

"Are we close?!"

Steve ducked a low hanging branch, leaving Petra to wonder how he knew it was coming, "The monsters are getting thicker now."

"Is that a yes?" Lukas called over Petra's shoulder.

Steve nodded, and turned once again forward.

With the fall weather making daytime shorter, sunset was already close, it would soon be dark. Monsters would grow in number in the shadows. The chances of Jesse surviving a second night, much less the rest of the day were slim.

The horses burst into a clearing, and skidded to a stop by the muddy banks of the river. They had lost sight of it shortly after they had taken off, but there is was again. Orange sunlight glittered off the calm waters. Most of the water still moved slowly down the river continuing path. But a small amount slopped down, making a large pool.

The watering hole.

Steve was already off Titan, walking slowly along the banks.

"I don't see him," Lukas whispered.

Petra didn't reply, just kept her eyes on the waters. There was no Jesse on the banks. But the water was deep and dark at the bottom...

"Steve!"

Steve didn't respond, he kneeled in the mud, inspecting the markings in the ground. "Someone was here," he stated after a moment.

Panic flared in Petra's chest.

"Was?!" Lukas asked, fear dripping in his voice.

Steve nodded, "A few hours ago." he moved farther inland.

Petra was about to get off the horse, "What if he is in the water!"

"He's not," Steve replied, "Just stay on Gaea."

"We're not going to sit on a horse while Jesse is-"

"Jesse isn't here."

"Where is he?!" Lukas panicked.

"Someone else came through here a few hours ago as well," Steve replied, his voice even and calm. "They probably found him."

"Where would they go?! He could be anywhere!"
Steve climbed back on Titan. "There is only one village near here, if anyone took Jesse, they'd take him there." He stirred Titan forward, Gaea following after automatically. "Don't worry we'll find him."

Petra started to say something, but her mouth clamped shut.

"Petra we can't do this," Lukas hissed in her ear, "He's probably leading us on a wild goose chase. If Steve had been truly fishing earlier, like he claimed, he would have seen Jesse don't you think. He's wasting our time. Jesse has to be here somewhere."

"I really think he's trying to help."

"The last guy sent us into spider's nest. Steve's probably some psychopath who lives in his isolated cabin in the middle of nowhere."

Petra frowned, "I don't think so, besides, "She looked down, the horse was already going full gallop, "Do you think jumping off is the smartest thing to do right now?"

Lukas said nothing, and adjusted his grip around Petra's waist.

The village was fairly decent in size. Most of the primitive villages Lukas had seen so far on this never ending journey home had been quaint, if not insecure. The one however was not.

Resting on a rolling hill, the village was built upon layers. All along the town's paths were watchtowers of various height and width. A stone wall circled the village, going not only around the houses themselves, but the multitude of garden's and out building's as well. There was a town hall, a library, blacksmith and what looked like a school. Even at the edge of town there was a race track and a large amphitheater built into the hill-side.

It was one of a kind.

Also the first one Lukas had seen where most of the locals were armed. Most of the men carried swords, and there were archers in the towers as well as guards at the cities gates. To top off security, there were at least a dozen golems within the town, Lukas spotted at least eight or nine more in the farmer's district, the silent stone behemoths walking between rows of corn and wheat.

Secure indeed.

Seeing Steve actually take them to a village and not some desolate cabin in the woods gave Lukas a little relief.

But it was brief.

Steve pulled the horses to a stop in front of - what Lukas assumed - was the blacksmith. "Bach!" the man hollered.

A large thick man exited the building. Easily taller than Steve. He was bald, but sported a thick black beard and mustache, growing all the way down to the middle of his chest. His dark tan face and exposed arms were dirtied with grim and sweat. Burn scars littered his muscular arms, and another on his left jaw, disappearing under his beard. He was different from other blacksmiths Lukas had seen, there was nothing small and humble about this man.
Bach was the definition of scary.

"Steve!" Bach grinned broadly, "Back from the river already? I assumed you'd be up there for a few more days at most. Was the fishing that good?" His smile dropped when he spotted Lukas and Petra, "What happened? Who are they?"

Steve unhook his bag of fish from his saddle and threw it effortlessly towards the blacksmith, who caught it with the same amount of ease, "I'm afraid there was a mishap, has anyone been to the watering hole lately?"

"No why-"

"Our friend fell in the river, he's wounded," Petra blurted, not stopping as Bach looked to her with a hardened stare, "Steve said someone might have found him at the watering hole."

Bach's eyes softened at the explanation, he turned back to Steve, "I'm sorry my friend, but this time of year only you and the Healer go to the pond."

Steve cursed.

Lukas swallowed thickly, his heart pounding hard against his chest. Jesse wasn't here then. He was probably back-

"Bach? Who is that?"

Bach looked back into his shop, "It's Steve luv, he's run into a bit of trouble."

A woman exited the building, cleaner than her male counterpart. Her much paler face was covered in a fine sheen of sweat, a sprig of dill in her dark brown hair. In her hand she carried a large wooden ladle, large enough to bludgeon. She was pregnant, easily five months or so along. But the tender glow of future motherhood did not mask her confident and strong posture.

"Mariah," Bach explained, "His little friends here lost their mate in the river. Steve thinks he washed up in the pond."

Mariah raised an eyebrow, her cloudy grey eyes immediately filled with worry, "Did they now?" She looked at Steve, "You were wondering if anyone has seen him?"

Steve nodded.

"Aye, I told them no one has been up to the pond for a few weeks now,"

"What does he-" Mariah grabbed her husband's arm, "Bach wait. The Healer."

Steve leaned in, "Was she there?"

"I went to see her early this morning," Mariah replied, "Picking up a potion for my morning sickness. She was very busy cleaning up a young lad. Awful mess he was. Poisoned by an archer she said."

"Jesse!" Lukas and Petra cried.

Steve was already turning the horses, "Bach, Mariah, I owe you."

"You know you owe us nothing!" Bach called as they rode away, "Good luck young ones!"
Petra looked slowly around as the horses came to a stop.

Much to her dismay, this 'Healer', didn't live within the city limits; instead choosing to live about a quarter of a mile out of town. Then to her greater dismay - and her fear - this was the nothing like a hospital or medical facility.

It was a farmhouse.

Which Steve had the keys to apparently? He was already off the horse and walking up the porch steps.

Petra waited for Lukas to get off their ride- which he almost twisted his own ankle in the process of doing - before she made her descent. Lukas aided her as she moved down the saddle.

Her feet stepped down on mossy, cushy, thick grass, and Lukas immediately moved closer to her and there he remained.

"You don't need to stand there like scarecrows you know." the older male called from the wraparound porch.

Lukas had a hand in Petra's, tightening in discomfort. Neither moved.

Steve huffed, "Okay, wait here then." He added, "Can't say I blame you."

Petra watched for a moment as Steve fiddled with the lock, and then slowly looked around the property.

The farm looked harmless enough, large multi-story house. There was a hanging swing on the porch, and multiple cushioned chairs. There was an equally large garden to the left, and blooming flower beds. Animal's pens not far off to the right, each well stocked with feed and barns for the animals. Even sunflowers grew along the vine covered stone wall that lined the property.

Certainly not any obvious sign of danger.

Right?

"Lukas…"

"I'll follow you." The blonde whispered.

Petra nodded and moved forward, her team mate right behind.

They were almost on the porch when Steve finally got the door open, "I really got to fix that lock." He smiled at the pair, "Welcome to my home."

Petra paused, "I thought this was the Healer's home."

"It is, and well, it's mine to."

"Does that mean..."

Steve nodded as he walked in; "I am a married ma-" Steve froze.

"Steve?" Lukas asked. "What's wr-"
"ALEX!" The older male's sudden shout startled Petra, confused as she watched him race into the dim house.

Lukas tapped her shoulder and pointed. Following his finger she spotted the apparent source of Steve's distress. It was shattered glass, glittering in thousands of tiny pieces on the dark oak floor.

"ALEX! Answer me!" To see someone - who had handled a monstrous spider with unnatural calm earlier - look so stressed, was unnerving. Steve was hurrying towards a closed door on the other side of the wide room, "Alex where-" The door opened at that moment.

"Steve what is it-" A carrot top ginger female flew out of the room, oddly enough with a letter opener in hand. She collided with Steve, her forehead connecting to his jaw. Both let out a cry, more from surprise then pain, and tumbled to the floor in a mess of arms and legs.

It was done and over so quickly that Lukas and Petra had barely time to react.

"Um, what just happened?" Lukas said.

The pair quickly began to untangle themselves, grunting and groaning as they went.

"Damn it Steve!"

"Why yell at me? You're the one who didn't answer me! Why in the world are you wielding the letter opener?!"

"You're the one who was screaming for me, I thought you were hurt! I thought something was wrong and I didn't have time to exactly arm myself did I?"

Steve was the first to stand, rubbing his tender jaw, "Understandable, but a letter opener? I mean, really sweetie?"

"Don't sweetie me." Alex stood, dusting herself off, "Who are your friends?"

"Lukas and Petra," Steve said, "I'm gonna cut to the chase here. They got lost in the woods and one of their team mates was hurt and fell in the river. I thought he might have washed up in the watering hole, but there was no one there. Mariah said you had a patient and I was hoping-"

"Alex are you okay?"

Petra's eyes widened. That voice...

Steve made a startled glance towards the door which Alex had exited from moments before, "Who was that?"

"My patient," Alex replied, "His name is-"

"Jesse!" Petra cried.

Lukas and Petra raced by the pair, hardly pausing to squeeze through the door way.

Inside the quaint and well furnished room, Jesse sat propped up in a thick framed bed. Bandages wrapped the majority of his chest and there were a few scrapes and bruises around his face and arms. But the most important bit, was that he was *alive*.

Jesse stared wide eyed, "Guys? How did you-"
"You're okay!" Petra rushed to the bed, "We thought we lost you when you fell in the river!"

"I was poisoned-"

"We know!" Lukas cut in, joining Petra by the bed, "We've been searching all day for you!"

Jesse raised an eyebrow, "How did you find me?"

"Well we followed the river first, and then we ran into -"

"I'm glad this worked out,"

Lukas and Petra turned, to see Steve at the door, one arm wrapped around his wife. He winked at Alex, "Glad you went to the watering hole today,"

Alex shook her head, "I can't imagine how you missed him Steve."

"His friends say he fell in during the storm," Steve explained, "I wasn't by the river during that." He smiled brightly, "I take it you're Jesse?"

"And you must be Alex's husband, Steve," Jesse replied.

"That I am. Pleased to meet you, shame it was under such stressful conditions."

"We met Steve by the spider's nest," Lukas started.

"Spider's nest!" Jesse sputtered.

Alex gave Steve a look, "You took them through the crevice?!!"

"No, I found them there." Steve replied, "Look, I tell you about it and you tell me about the broken glass." He paused, "And what in Notch's beard happened to your nose." He tapped his wife's nose.

The female exchanged glances with Jesse, who in turn blushed horribly, "It's almost ironic really. But-" She tugged her partner's arm, "I tell you later. Why don't we clean up the kitchen and get dinner for everyone and let these three catch up?"

Steve nodded, "Sounds good, Lukas, Petra," he smiled at the pair, "We'll be out here if you need anything."

And with that, Steve and Alex closed the door behind them.

Petra returned her attention to Jesse, smiling brightly, "I'm just so glad you're okay."

"I'm glad to see you guys," Jesse replied, "But what about you? You look awful, and what's this about a spider's nest?"

Lukas let out a disgusted noise, "Well after we lost you we ran into the woods. Then got attacked by some monster, I was shot- no poison don't worry - and Petra twisted her ankle. We followed the river, which led to this gorge between the mountains. It was full of spiders, big ones."

"Okay?"

"No seriously, big ones. We are talking the size of a small house big. One almost ate me."

Jesse's eyes widen slightly.
"Then Steve showed up and just," Petra shrugged, "Killed it."

"Killed it?"

"He didn't even break a sweat Jesse."

Jesse looked towards the door, eyes full of curiosity, "From what I gathered from Alex, Steve is the main hunter for their village; it wouldn't surprise me. But spider's as big as a house? That seems farfetched."

"We're serious; this world is different from the others we've been to." Lukas pressed.

"Speaking of different worlds," Petra said her voice dropping into a whisper. "What have you told Alex?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well Lukas and I haven't told Steve about the portal." Petra explained, "As far as he's concerned, the three of us are from beyond the mountain range."

"The one past the volcano?"

"Yes. What have you told Alex?"

"Nothing so far," Jesse answered. "She's curious but-"

Suddenly the door opened and Steve and Alex walked in. "Who's hungry?" Steve asked, "It's been a long weekend for everyone don't you think?" Alex herself was carrying a large tray filled to the brim with various meats and other delicious food items. It smelled absolutely perfect.

Petra felt her stomach rumble, she glanced at Jesse who gave her an encouraging nod. "Thank you," she said as she took a plate.

"Thank you so much for finding Jesse," Lukas said as he took one as well.

"Gladly," Alex replied, she handed a bowl of stew to Jesse. "Sorry dear, until your stomach settles it's stew for you."

Jesse still took the bowl, "I'm not complaining."

Lukas and Petra remained on the bed as Steve and Alex took the two chairs across the room. Petra hardly paused a second to cool her food she was so hungry. The food tasted as good as it smelled, the meat nearly melting in her mouth.

"So," Steve said as he settled into his chair, he took a small bite of food and smiled at the now complete trio, "What brings you three through the Portal of Worlds?"
"What brings you three through the Portal of Worlds?"

Jesse accidentally put the spoon of hot soup in his mouth without blowing because he was so shocked. It was a very bad move, the thick liquid scalded his tongue and burned the roof of his mouth. It took all his willpower not to scream. In silver lining however the food bought him a few seconds to think of an intelligent answer.

Petra and Lukas were equally speechless, both of them nervously glancing at Jesse to come up with something.

Why did he always have to answer the hard questions?

Jesse swallowed his throat thick with discomfort. He then set his spoon casually back into his stew, ready with a comeback...

"Pardon?"

Petra's eyes suddenly glinted with a look that said, Really? That's the best response you can come up with?

Lukas looked very close to slapping himself.

Steve's eyes glittered as well, sparkling with humor and delight, as if he knew the trio was struggling for some valid excuse. "The door," he answered, "Up in the abandoned ruins."

"Ruins?" Jesse echoed, "No...only saw woods."

"That's right," Lukas added slowly, "We were by the river almost the whole time."

Steve looked surprised, "Really? It's hard to miss. Big houses, big temple. There is a large glowing door that leads to this massive hallway, inside there are more doors which lead to different places. The door flashes everytime someone comes through it. Saw it flash last night, met you today-"

Alex slapped Steve's arm gently, "Steve..." she warned.

"Can't say we've been there..." His heart was pounding. Already Jesse was reminded of the last village, the ones that had tried to kill them, called them insane. He let his eyes barely shift towards the door.

Could Lukas and Petra get out of here with him handicapped? Maybe if he made a distraction-

"Jesse," Steve pulled Jesse's focus away from the door, "Jesse it's alright," Steve dropped his tease, a gentle tone in his voice, "I don't blame you for being cautious. But everyone in the village knows about the Portal. Besides..." he smiled at Petra, "There is no village on the other side of the Adamans. I've mapped this entire world and there aren't any more towns that way. Besides, anyone from here would have known about the spider's nest."

Petra turned scarlet.

"How do you know about the door?" Jesse said warily.

"Because I've gone through it a few times."
Lukas's eyes went wide, "Really?"

Steve nodded, "Yep. I mean I just explained it to you in great detail and everything."

"Some of the villager's" Alex cut in with a look at Steve, "Their ancestors came through that door. Lost folks who were trying to find their way home, but instead settled here. So the Portal is no mystery to us. We don't blame you for trying to hide that fact though."

"We know a lot of different worlds can be hostile to other worlders." Steve added, "Some call it witchcraft. The Old Builder's didn't exactly leave notes lying around saying what the portals."

"Wait you know about the Old Builder's?" Petra cut in.

"Yes..." Alex responded with a slow drag.

"How?!!"

Steve glanced at his wife then back at the group, "Because this world was the first one to have a portal door."

Jesse raised an eyebrow, "The first?" That seemed far-fetched. "How do you know?"

"The Immortal's journals."

"Immortals?"

"Yep. The Immortal, um, the one called the First; He had the ability to travel through different worlds. He met other individuals who were interested in multi-world travel and brought them here. Together they built the Portal."

"Wait, the First?" Lukas frowned. Jesse could sense the doubt seeping off the blonde.

Steve looked at him, "Never heard of him?"

"We have, but isn't he a legend?" Lukas answered. "The 'First' is just an old myth, a bedtime story."

Steve coughed, "Oh boy...Alex?"

The female adjusted in her seat, "I'm guessing you three have noticed by this point that this world is drastically different from any other world you've been to."

"Yeah I guess," Jesse said, "The spawns are stronger, the world itself is different. We saw bones at the ruins...to name a few things."

"That's because this world is always changing," Alex said, "This is going to sound hard to believe. But everything you've seen everywhere else. All of it has started here."

"What do you mean?"

Steve rubbed the back of his neck, "Do you believe in Notch?"

Petra looked at Jesse, confused by the sudden change of topic, "Sure... I suppose."

"Well all those stories you've probably heard. The ones about the first world, the original creation. This is it. Everything Notch makes past, present and future, starts here. He tests it here, before creating a world especially for that creation. The First World, The Immortals, all of that is real. You
kids found it."

Jesse leaned back, suddenly feeling a little dizzy, "Kay..."

"Hard to swallow, I know." Steve answered sympathetically. "But it really is the truth kids."

"How do you know for sure though?"

"Well, there is the library for one." Alex said. "The books - most if not all of them - are journals. From people who lived and died here, going back centuries till...the beginning I suppose."

He thought hard on this, "You said the Old Builder's started here?"

"Yes."

"How well are these journals documented?"

Steve thought for a moment, "I'd say rather thoroughly. Some of them even belonged to Old Builders, the dead ones anyway..."

Jesse snapped his fingers, "Perfect!"

Lukas and Petra turned to look at him, confused. Lukas leaned in a little, "Jesse? What are you thinking?"

"If the Old Builder's started here, and everything is documented - we can probably figure out where home is!"

Lukas looked leery, "That could take a lot of time, what about the doors?"

"I thought we were kinda getting sick of running through those..." Jesse countered, "First World or not this place has information on the Old Builder's! This is literally the newest information we've had on them in ages,"

"What if they don't have our door written down? Then we would have wasted all this time."

Jesse hesitated.

"Well," Steve offered, "Alex and I can help. We've traveled the doors, so we know where a few of them lead to already. That will eliminate some..."

"We could split up-" Petra started, holding up her hand as Lukas gave her a look, "Hear me out Lukas. Alex or Steve can go with some of us through the doors, and some of us can stay behind and read the books. We have twice the chance that way."

Lukas leaned back, "Good point..."

"We're not forcing you to do anything," Steve said, "You can heal up and go on your merry way."

"We're all going to agree on something," Jesse said, "The goal in the end is to get home. We don't want to drag you guys into anything though..."

"We don't mind helping." Steve replied, "You three aren't the first people this world has helped guide home."

"We'll leave you alone for a moment. This is your mission, you decide how it must go." Alex said,
grabbing her and Steve's dishes, "Take your time."

The pair quietly exited, door closing behind them.

"Let's give it a shot," Lukas said after a moment,

"And here I thought you were going to debate," Petra said.

"It doesn't scream bad idea. Steve and Alex are clearly...capable? They know this world, and they know the Hallway..." Lukas pointed. "You're right, two teams going at it gives us twice the chance."

"Alex and Steve seem willing to help," Petra said. "Do you think we can trust them?"

"I think we can," Jesse said. "It doesn't matter if this is a the 'First World' or not. These guys want to help us and have info on the Old Builders. Pretty sweet deal if you ask me."

"If anything seems off, we can leave and head straight for Ground Town," Lukas said. "We know where the Portal is."

"Cool! It's time for plan...um...uh..."Jesse laughed, "What plan is this?"

"Plan G or something or another," Lukas smiled, then he stood, "Tomorrow, I'll go back to Ground Town and fill Aiden and Ivor in on the new game plan. With luck we'll find our door before winter sets in."

Petra gave a thumbs up and looked towards the door, "Steve! Alex! I think we got it figured out!"

"Those boots my child, have seen better days."

Lukas cringed, feeling the mud ooze against his socks, "Haven't really had time to make myself knew ones..."

Steve tugged Titan's reigns, steering the massive horse around a equally massive puddle, "Ever thought about trying metal toed ones?"

The rainstorm had eased up greatly by the next day. Its damage now done, the only remains of the storm's fury were light drizzling periodically now and then. Lukas had set off for the Door early that morning, with Steve in tow at Petra's and Jesse's insistence. Neither pair were ready to move at high speeds yet. Lukas didn't mind, the night before had been such a turnaround he didn't really know where the ruins were anyway. The only way back that he knew was up river- through the spiders nest.

Steve had saddled up Titan; Gaia was needed by Alex for the day. But shortly out of town, the two men and the horse were met with a washed out road and six inches of mud. With no point in spraining the horse's foot, it was decided they would walk until they hit the ancient road that lead to the abandoned ruins...or solid ground, whichever came first.

Lukas looked down at his mud stained boots, "No, haven't really. Are they better?"

"Good for walking," Steve answered, "And kicking someone."

Lukas laughed.
"I'll have the tailor make you some when we get back."

"You don't have to do that."

"It'll be better for you," Steve said, "Besides, if you're going to be exploring more worlds and hidden Ancient Builder caches, we need to keep you on your feet."

"Well, thank you I'll pay you back,"

"Don't worry." Steve said, his own foot sinking down in the mud. He made a face, "I need a new pair anyway. How is your shoulder holding up? I'm sorry we're walking, we'll be on more stable ground soon."

"It's fine thank you for asking," Lukas said, "I feel much better. Not like you could predict the weather though..."

Steve looked at the sky, "Sometimes I think Notch is keeping me on my toes." he mumbled.

The sky rumbled with thunder.

Lukas looked up, "You really believe in Notch don't you? Can I ask why?"

"Same reason you don't I suppose."

Lukas blushed, "I wouldn't say I don't believe. It's just..." he sighed, "Some of the scriptures back home make Him sound so..."

"Harsh." he and Steve said at the same time. Lukas looked at Steve in surprise. "How did you-?"

"I get it." The older make said softly, "Why would someone who seems so caring make worlds full of suffering and monsters. You're not the only one who thinks that Lukas. People wonder that all the time, why does he make Creepers, or the mighty Ender Dragon? Or the Immortals, why make mighty guardians only for them to turn on each other. How can someone who promotes wonder and awe make things so vile?"

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset-"

"People asks those questions all the time," then Steve gave Lukas a reassuring smile, "Do you know how the people here get through it?"

Lukas remained silent, waiting for Steve's answer.

"Because you can't see the awe, wonder and the beauty without seeing the dark, vile, and ugly," Steve explained. "How can you appreciate the life you've been given if there is nothing out there with the risk of taking it away? We have a saying here, a blessing of sorts: May you find as much awe and wonder as the First and the people who came before you."

Lukas thought on it, "I never really saw it that way."

"This world, these people," Steve continued, "They've witnessed things no one else gets to see. It's almost like getting a sneak preview in a book. They get to watch Notch create something new, be it dangerous or beautiful. They get to learn what it is, what it can do, before anyone else. I mean you got to admit, that is pretty cool."

"It is," Lukas admitted.
"Notch hasn't made anything in a long time, but maybe if your lucky-"

"Stweeve!"

Steve stopped and both he and Lukas turned to see a little boy running up a muddy path, "Stweeeeve!" he cried.

Steve caught the teary eyed child in his arms as the youngster ran into him, "Julius what's wrong?"

"My cat, is stwuck in the twee!" He sobbed.

"Ah," Steve relaxed, "Don't worry we'll get him down." He placed the boy on the horse, "Hang on Julius."

The boy sniffed and grabbed onto the saddle horn, Titan waiting patiently for him to adjust.

"Do you need some help?" Lukas asked.

"It will only take a moment, this has happened before." Steve responded. "Just keep walking down the road, I'll catch up."

"Jesse and Petra won't like that," Lukas grinned cheekily.

Steve held a finger to his lips, winking. Then turning on his heel, the older male was off, sprinting faster than a marathon runner. Titan followed after, the boy babbling about his cat and the tree, till they disappeared around the bend.

Lukas continued up the path, concluding that even if Steve had wanted his help, he wouldn't have been able to keep up anyway.

"Such a nice young man,"

Lukas screamed and whipped around, seeing Elder Brine calmly seated on an old stone bench.

"How are you my boy," Brine asked with a smile, one tooth missing Lukas noticed, "Did you find your friend?"

Still trying to get his breath back Lukas nodded.

"Oh good! Did the shortcut help?"

Lukas frowned, "There was a spider's nest in there. Why didn't you tell us about it?"

Brine tilted his head, "Everyone knows about the spider's nest child. How could you not?"

He hesitated, "Um, well..." His frown deepened, "You could have told us the spiders were bigger than a house."

Now Brine seemed surprised, "That is large! Oh dear," he shook his head in distress, "I am truly sorry Lukas, but I haven't been in that nest in ages, it's been some time."

"But surely you knew," Lukas said with a cross of his arms.

Brine stood, hands gripping his walking stick,"I am quite old boy, and I haven't been there since I was your age. I assure you they were little spiders last I checked."
Lukas paused, "How old are you exactly?"

"One hundred and six," the man answered.

His eyes went wide, "What?"

"It's hardly anything compared to my father," Brine said absentmindedly.

"Umm,"

"Besides," Brine smiled, "You found your friend! But you seem to be down two now."

"Well they're resting and-" Lukas started walking down the path, trying to think of a reason to be traveling alone, "Jesse was hurt as you know, and Petra's foot was twisted. I'm going back to get our stuff."

The old man followed after, keeping well paced for a hundred plus year old, "I see, is that inside the Portal Door or outside of it?"

"Outside-" Lukas stiffened.

"Relax, everyone knows." Brine hummed, "The spider's nest is a dead giveaway."

"So I've been told," Lukas sighed.

"You're trying to get home?" the elder asked softly.

"Yep,"

"Allow me to offer my assistance."

"You don't need to do that-"

"Oh I'm much to old to be Portal hopping, but I'm full of information that might help." Brine said, "For example there is another Portal here."

"We've already got one though," Lukas politely responded, "We don't exactly need another door."

"Yes, but this one is special."

"Okay, I'll bite, how special?"

Brine smiled, "It's the Immortal's Portal."

Lukas looked at the sky with a sigh, "Immortal's huh?"

"Yes, legend says it has the ability to take you to any world that you desire. They called it the Immortal's Gate."

Now Lukas was interested. "Wait seriously?" He looked down the road, "I wonder why Steve didn't mention it."

"Because it has been lost for some time. Steve and the other villagers will not touch it even if it was found..." Brine answered, "The people here do not take the Immortal's tools lightly. They have no desire to unearth it; the First and his creations are sacred to them,"

"I'm not going to break into some temple and offend someone," Lukas said warily, "That's seems
rude. Everyone here has been really nice so far..."

"Understandable." Brine said. "But if one were to find it, and well, leave, they would never know."

"I don't know-"

"I have some old logs buried in my house somewhere," Brine said, "I shall look and see what I can find on the Immortal's Gate. If we find it, and if you and your friends are weary for home...Perhaps the people will understand."

"Thank you," Lukas said quietly, pushing away the guilt inside. Brine did kinda have a point, and Steve and Alex did say they would help get them home.

What if the Immortal's Gate was it?

"Wait Brine how will we know when you-" Lukas looked around.

The old man had wandered off. Vanished.

"Creepy."

"What is?"

Lukas turned around, to see Steve walking up the path with Titan in tow. There were three long cat scratches on his nose.

Lukas raised an eyebrow. "What happened to your nose, that's what."

"Okay, so I'm not good with cats," Steve smiled.

"Shame, I am," Lukas said with a grin.

Steve laughed, "I'll bring you next time then." He pulled Titan forward, "In other news, I'd say the road is more firm now. How bout you and I ride this lazy oaf?"

Titan neighed, jabbing its nose into Steve's hair.

"Okay okay, mighty steed."

The horse snorted. As if to say, 'That's better.'.

Lukas chuckled; looking down at his mud saturated shoes he knew that he would have brown socks instead of white by the time he got to Aiden's. "Sounds like a plan, no point in tracking any more dirt into my friend's house than I have to."
"Steve and Alex huh?" Aiden asked, he cracked an egg and dropped it into the sizzling pan.

Lukas leaned against the counter, steaming mug in hand. It fought away the bitter chill in his fingers courteous of the Hallway. He inspected an odd relic - a pot - on the dining table, "That's what they called themselves anyway..." He pointed at the jewel covered centerpiece. "That's new, I don't remember that one."

Aiden glanced over his shoulder, eyeing the glittering object, "You were sick," he replied. "Jesse brought it back the same time you lost half your body in blood. He said he got it from the same jungle world-" Aiden laughed at Lukas's expression,"Don't worry it is sterilized, no *Coughing Plague* on that bad boy. I just got all the gunk and grim cleaned off of it. There had to be at least two to three inches thick of the stuff."

"I see...Don't tell Jesse it's made of gems, he might want it back."

Aiden laughed and added another egg.

"Speaking of *that* week, how is Bites doing?"

Bites was Aiden's unintentional new pet. The pet term was used loosely, seeing as Bites was over fifty feet long and was formally the man eating punishment of an ancient jungle tribe. Aiden had saved him from a nasty tangle, and in the snake just wound up outside of his house one morning...Aiden would deny it, but he had a soft spot for the giant reptile now.

Aiden looked out the window. Fog covered the trees and lake in a eerie blanket, symbolizing the dropping in the temperature. "It's too cold for him here now. He crossed the river about a week ago and is hibernating in that small patch of jungle on the other side. I'm betting he won't show up until spring at latest."

"I'm gonna miss him," Lukas hummed, "But I'm sure you're glad you don't have to worry about feeding him for awhile."

Aiden snorted and continued cooking, "Anyway, sounds like you guys had quite a start."

Lukas let out a disgusted noise, "Not my ideal start I assure you."

"Jesse and Petra doing better?"

"Petra should be walking in a day or two, and Alex says Jesse will be able to move in a week as long as he doesn't push himself.

Aiden looked at Lukas's shoulder, "What about you?"

Lukas didn't notice his worried glance, "I'm fine," he looked at Aiden, "Why?"

Aiden looked back to his pan, "You got shot dummy. Plus a giant spider tried to eat you."

"Oh yeah, I'm fine."

"If you say so," Aiden pulled some plates out of the cabinet, "So when is Steve showing up?"

"Oh," Lukas hesitated, "He isn't."
"He left you here?"

"Well, he had things that are important to do," Lukas explained, "He's one of the only hunters in his village and winter is coming soon..."

At least that was one of the things Steve had told him,

"So this is the door?" Steve asked.

Lukas did a double take, "Yep, Ground Town."

"Catchy," Steve said as he marked it with a sign.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm leaving a sign, so I know where it is."

"You're leaving?!"

Steve flinched, "Are you okay staying here a day or two?"

Lukas was baffled, "What? I thought you were coming with me to meet Ivor and Aiden."

"I was, but remember when I had to get that cat out of the tree. Well there has been a change in plan, you see, one of the village elders was there. He was hoping to catch me before we left. It seems one of our scouts was keeping an eye on the watering hole and - spiders."

"Spiders?"

"Yeah, from the nest, - you know the one - Anyway, they're all worked up and moving down river, at this rate they'll move into the village. I have got to go back to the ravine and kill a few of the big ones."

"Why the big ones? Why not the small spiders."

"Believe me, I would if I could," Steve laughed to himself, "But the big ones are lazy, they stay in the nest. They eat whatever food rarely comes in, or they eat the food from the smaller spider's kills, or if really hungry, they'll eat the smaller spiders. If I kill the little ones, the big ones will leave the nest."

"This isn't because Petra and I crashed through there is it?" Lukas asked.

"No, you're not the first off worlders to walk somewhere you shouldn't. I don't know why they are aggravated," Steve sighed, "Could be anything. But with the spiders moving about they're stirring up other spawns that are already down for winter. My village has there one last big hunt tomorrow. I wasn't going to go, but with the monsters...Well they need my help Lukas."

"So you're killing spiders and helping them hunt?"

"Yep. Look, I know it sounds like I'm doing a lot of heavy lifting for them. But this has been a hard year for my people. We lost a lot of good folks to a mudslide earlier this year, and food has been scarce. It's not our best run. I'm one of the few people who can still help Lukas."

Lukas nodded, "No, it makes sense, friends over strangers yeah? I don't want to hold anyone up."

"You guys aren't holding up anyone," Steve elbowed him, "I consider us friends anyway. It will only be a day or two I swear. Either Alex or I will meet you here at the door. Then we'll get searching for
"They sound like they have it harder than we do," Aiden mused, pulling Lukas from his thoughts.

"Yeah..."

Aiden slid the food onto three plates, "Ivor!" he shouted, "Get your nose out of your dusty old book and get out here! The food is ready!"

Lukas gave him a look, "Aiden! He's in a wheelchair with a broken leg give him a break!"

Aiden returned the look, "Don't, be fooled..."

Ivor rolled out of the former guest bedroom, now Aiden's study. In one hand he held a dusty old book, well used and well read by the worn edges. The other hand pushed his wheelchair with relative ease. Ivor had it down so well in fact, that the book could switch hands as he adjusted direction. Not once did he look up, or even break his stride.

Aiden looked at Lukas, "See?"

Lukas slid into an empty chair, "Hey Ivor, whatcha reading?"

"This is my journal," Lukas sighed and rolled his eyes, "Kay, that doesn't answer my question."

"You're story interests me," Ivor replied, "Especially the bit about the First World. If I recall correctly, my journal has notes about it somewhere in here."

"You managed to hang onto your book this whole time?"

"Yes. It never leaves my person," Ivor explained, "I've been looking for my notes on it since you got here."

"Why?"

"If you and the others have truly found this 'First World' it would be an amazing discovery."

Aiden took a bite of his food, "So? If you never left your dimension, your home would be considered the 'First' to you. They probably don't even know any better."

Lukas shrugged, chewing his own meal, "Maybe not. Their portal door was different from all the others in the Hallway."

"So? Maybe they decided to one up the other doors."

"I don't know," Lukas replied, "Everyone there seemed pretty familiar with the portal gate. Steve even said he traveled the Hallway for a few years."

"Just think," Ivor said eagerly, "Notch's first creation - the source of all the other worlds!"

"Notch?" Aiden rolled his eyes, "Now you sound like those religious fanatics back home."

"They were not fanatics," Ivor argued, "You're just a skeptic."

"I am," Aiden replied, "Because they are bedtime stories Ivor. Every kid grew up with tales of Notch
and the Wanderer. They're just stories to inspire awe and wonder.”

Lukas paused from his eating. "What did you say?"

"I said they're bedtime stories."

"No, no, the part after," Lukas said, "Awe and wonder."

"Yeah what about it?" Aiden stared at him, "Come on man, how could you forget?" he explained, "Our parents dragged us to the temple like once a week. All the priests would tell the tales of the Wanderer or the First or whatever. Tell all the stories about what he did, and how he brought the 'awe' and 'wonder' into life."

Lukas remembered; remember just fine, but the statement..."I heard Steve say something like that," Lukas answered, he looked at Ivor, "He said, 'May you find as much awe and wonder at the First' or something like that."

"The First and the Wanderer are the same person, just different names," Ivor stopped on a certain page, "The first human ever created, the Immortal."

Aiden scoffed.

"Here are my notes," Ivor continued, "I have a copy of the passage: Notch looked around and saw no one to enjoy his world. So he created the first human, immortal and full of wonder; that way he would never tire of the world before him. See? Perhaps the people there have adopted this philosophy."

"It's a story, Ivor." Aiden frowned.

"Doesn't matter," Lukas said, "This Immortal is real to the people there. He supposedly had temples all over their world. They were made alongside the Old Builder, and they might have information on them. More importantly they might have information on getting us home. Jesse, Petra and I are gonna look around there a little longer and see what we can find."

"If that's all it's for," Aiden sighed, "Guess it couldn't hurt. Next you're gonna say the Healer is real." Lukas laughed.

"Interesting fact," Ivor piped up, "The Healer might not be the second immortal created. Some loose manuscripts I have found in my travels suggest otherwise. Some passages say there was another that came between the two."

"Really?" Lukas asked, genuinely interested.

Aiden sighed again, because he was genuinely uninterested.

"Yes, some passages lead up to another male, perhaps a brother. Some scripts say that the 'Healer' came to fix a world undone by Notch's mistakes. Of course there is no reference as to what that mistake really was. But some have described a battle of 'Gods'..." Ivor happily flipped through more pages, "It's quite fascinating really."

"Sounds like it," Lukas agreed.

"Just be careful," Aiden warned, "This world sounds...dangerous."

"What world isn't Aiden," Lukas replied, "But we'll be careful I promise. I'm glad you care though."
His friend stuck out his tongue, "Naw, just don't want to be stuck with Ivor till eh dies."

Ivor kicked him under the table with his good foot.

"OW!"

Lukas laughed.

"Traitor!"
"Coward!"
"Murderer!"
"Notch save us please!"
"I burn! Make it stop!"

Jesse's eyes shot open, staring with watering eyes at the smoldering world before him.

Where was he? What was going on?

People rushed past him, grimy, hurt, and frightened. "Protect us!" some of them screamed, "Stop him!"

Stop who? What happened? Where were Lukas and Petra-

A shadow leapt out of the smoke and Jesse lifted his sword, barely blocking the frighteningly strong strike.

"You turn your back on me, for them?!", The shadow screamed.

"You are the one who has turned your back on the people!" Jesse shouted back.

He was confused, this wasn't his voice. He could see his arms, bare, streaked with dirt and littered in scars. Who was this, this wasn't him!

"They are gnats under out feet, dust in our finger nails!" his attacker yelled.

"They must be protected; they must be shown the way!" Jesse spoke again.

"They must die!"

Jesse dodged a sword made of black obsidian, no, not obsidian. Diamond, the blackest diamond Jesse had ever seen. So dark that even the harsh glows of the fires and the bright white of the moon were swallowed into the depths of the weapon.

Who was this?

Jesse leapt back, twenty feet away. People screamed in terror and scrambled to safety, to the forest, down the mountain, anywhere to get away.

The ground cracked beneath his feet, and Jesse watched as he tore a thousand pounds worth of rock and iron and hurled it down the hill.

His enemy smashed through the rock, and sent his sword pointing skyward. He brought it back
down with a cry- Fire followed the blade down, raining down in a straight well aimed line from the heavens.

*What was this?*

Water swirled up from the ground, pulling free from the last green blades of the earth, and Jesse swirled it around him, effectively blocking the fire.

The other dashed through the steam and the smoke, sword swinging so fast and hard, it cut through the air with barely a whistle. Jesse blocked, his own diamond blade vibrating on impact. His entire arm shuddered from the mere force of his enemy.

"You are weak!" the other spat.

"It is you who is weak!"

"We are gods! You chose *them* over *me!*" The shadow almost sounded devastated, broken, "How could you do this to me?!"

"I don't even know you anymore!" Jesse cried back.

The other screamed in rage and swung his blade down again, "Then die with them!"

Jesse blocked, and watched as his diamond blade cracked-

"Jesse?"

Jesse sat up, blinking away sunlight, "Waaa?"

Alex was on a recliner, knitting a large blanket "Don't move too quickly, no point in tearing your stitches again dear."

Jesse stared at her, stunned.

Alex returned the gaze, "Don't worry you've only been out for a few hours. Steve just stopped by here, he said Lukas made it to Ground Town and will be staying there a day or so."

"He didn't stay with him?"

"There was a problem with the spider's nest I'm afraid. I would have gone to help but, I'm here watching you."

"I'm sorry,"

She smiled, "I don't mean it that way. I don't like spiders anyhow." She went back to her knitting, 'It sounded like you were dreaming."

"Yeah..." Jesse mumbled. "I was in some weird sword fight."

"Oh? Did you win?"

Jesse stared at the wall behind Alex, where two diamond swords were mounted. One of them had a long jagged crack in the blade.

"Jesse?"
"I don't know." Jesse finally answered, "I woke up... Hey Alex?"

"Hmmm?"

"Whatever happened to the village?"

"Which one?"

"The one with the portal, the one at the top of the mountain. Why does no one live there anymore?"

Her expression fell slightly, "They abandoned it," she said quietly.

"What happened there?"

She looked up at him, "There was a battle Jesse,"

"A battle? Like to armies or..." Jesse pressed.

"No." she answered, "Just two men. Is that what happened in your dream? Were you at the village?"

Jesse looked out the window, staring at the mountains in the distance. He could see the portal glow in the even as far away as they were. "I don't know. It kinda reminded me of it. But how could two men cause a village to evacuate." he looked back to the older female. "Do you know who won?"

He saw her eyes shift towards the swords, and she continued knitting.

"Alex?"

"No one won."
A week later...

"Tell me if you need to stop," Steve said.

Jesse smiled, "I'm good, but thanks for checking."

Steve nodded, "Okay, but you let me know the moment you get too tired. Because if you fall over dead, my wife will never let me hear the end of it."

Jesse laughed, "Don't worry I will."

Lukas finally returned a few days ago, carrying wishes of good luck and good will from the people of Ground Town. Steve had arrived later that afternoon, carry good news of a successful spider hunt and even better, a successful food hunt.

"Alex and I are now free to help you out," he said proudly as he pulled web from his hair.

"As soon as Jesse is better," Alex added.

It took a bit of coaxing added on with Jesse forcing himself to be still and resting as much as humanly possible for him. But Jesse managed to convince Alex that he was ready to move by the end of the week. As long as he didn't jump, run, or do anything even slightly more exhausting then a slow stroll, he was free to join Steve at the town's library.

"Alex knows where a nearby cache is," Petra said at breakfast. "It's in a dessert a few miles from here."

"So we're going to hit it while you and Steve hit the books," Lukas added.

"Sounds like a plan," Jesse replied.

"Just don't get bored," Petra teased.

Jesse was sure he wouldn't. Unlike Petra and Lukas he had yet to see the village. He was eager to visit it, so far he had only his friend's descriptions to go off of, and even they hadn't seen the bulk of the town.

"Steve!" a young woman approached the strolling pair, "Steve do you have a moment?" She had long dark braided hair, a common style to almost all the woman in the village. Her skin was pale white, spotted by a beauty mark on her right cheek and dimples. Atop her cute button nose and large brown eyes was a pair of large square glasses.

Cute, Jesse thought.

Steve stopped walking and Jesse took a moment to lean against one of the walls lining the road and rest. He may be mostly recovered, but he was just really stiff.

"What's up Mia?" Steve asked.

"I need your advice on the play for the festival and-"

"Mia," the older male chuckled. "You do a wonderful job every year; I don't see why you are so
worried."

"This is my first year without Elder Cornelius!" Mia pressed. "I need to have everything perfect."

Steve thought on this, "I'm a little busy Mia, I need to take Jesse here to the -"

"Please! I'm desperate!"

"We can help her," Jesse offered, "I'm not in too big a hurry."

"Mia," the other said patiently, "I'll send you the notes this afternoon, after I'm done at the library. How does that sound?"

The female visibly relaxed, "Oh thank you, thank you."

"Mia," the other said patiently, "I'll send you the notes this afternoon, after I'm done at the library. How does that sound?"

The female visibly relaxed, "Oh thank you, thank you." she looked over at Jesse, "Why are you two going to the library?"

"Jesse here," Steve said, placing a hand on his shoulder, "Is a little far from home. He's from beyond the Portal and needs a way back. We're hoping some notes on the Old Builder's will help him and his friends get home."

Mia's eyes went wide, "Oh! I'm so sorry! Steve you should have told me!" she shook Jesse's hand, "I am so sorry. I didn't realize what you were doing is so important- and me and my silly play, good heavens!"

"It's alright," Jesse assured.

"No, no. Listen," she said, "If you ever need my help with anything. Just ask for me, my name is Mia."

"Pleased to meet you Mia, I'm Jesse. Thanks for your offer."

"May you find wonder Jesse," she smiled. She turned to Steve, "I'll let you go, I'm so sorry again. I'll wait on my notes."

"Don't worry, I will get them to you."

The girl smiled, and then quickly hurried off.

Jesse watched her go, "Lukas wasn't kidding when he said you were popular."

Steve blushed, "Ah yeah, well..." he started to walk onward down the road, "I just like to help people."

"What was this about a play?"

"Hmm? Oh!" Steve lit up, "There is a festival we host at the first of November each year. It's a pretty big deal for the village. There is horse races, dancing, drinking, contests. It's also a time we celebrate the blessings provided by Notch throughout the year. We take the time to honor and respect our history as well. There is a play that is put on each year - it's the same everytime I don't know why Mia is so worried. But anyway, it is a narrative on the history of the First World. So it has Notch creating the world and the Immortals and all that jazz."

"People here really revere the First don't they?" Jesse asked.

"I wouldn't say that. It's more of a..." the adult thought on it, "A deep respect for the Hand of Notch."
"Hand of Notch? But you just said-"

"The First, I know."

Now Jesse was confused, "Then who is-"

"They're the same person Jesse," Steve laughed, "The First, the Wanderer, the Hand of Notch, all are different names for the first Immortal. You see," Steve gestured around. "Imagine being by yourself, in this great vast world, with no one to show you how things are done. If finally after all those ages, Notch finally created people, who were as confused as you first were. Wouldn't you want to help them?"

"Yeah, I suppose I would."

"That's where he gets the name the Hand of Notch. They say he guided them, like Notch would have, and showed them the way. That's why the people here look highly at the Immortal. He started them off."

"Huh," Jesse looked off, somewhat impressed, "Sounds like a neat guy."

Steve smiled.

"This festival sounds like a lot of fun."

"It's only a few weeks away. Perhaps if you are still here, Alex and I can take your friends to it."

"I'd like that." Jesse said softly, "I'm pretty sure we'll still be looking by that point."

Steve put an encouraging hand on his shoulder, "Don't worry kid, we'll find it. We won't stop until we do."

"I hate to take up so much of your time,"

The other chuckled, "Jesse, I have a lot more time on my hands than you think."

"Welcome to the library," Steve said quietly. He had already said it once, but apparently had said it too loud, and was promptly shushed by three people, "This building has our entire history here."

Jesse gaped. From the outside, the library looked like a simple wooden building. But inside, that was a completely different look. There were rolling beams, curved and swirling as they supported the walls. They were carved down to the finest detail portraying small scenes that Jesse couldn't make out unless he got closer. Tapestries hung from every available wall space and upon the edges of the bookshelves. Oh and the *bookshelves*, dozens upon dozens, each one filled with a hundred-hundreds of books.

Lukas would be *dying* to come here once Jesse told him about this place.

Jesse ran his hand along a set of ornate book spines, "They all look so different."

"Well they're not all books per say, about ninety percent of them are journals or logs, things from the ancestors." Steve explained.

"We...could be here awhile." he mumbled out.

Steve grinned, "Naw. Here, follow me."
The adult led him past all the tables and large comfy chairs where multiple people were reading or studying and up to a desk with small lean man. The 'librarian' Jesse assumed - was bald at the top of his head, common amongst the older men here, his nose was long, slightly crooked and the way he glared at his paperwork made Jesse feel guilty coming to bother him.


Charles stopped his stamping and looked up, "Hmmmm?"

"I need your help."

"Hmmmm," the sound came out very condescending. "Shouldn't you know this library by now Steve?"

"I need everything you have on Old Builder's" Steve said, ignoring the comment, "My friend here needs more information on them to get home."

"Hmph, very well." Charles reached under his desk and hefted up a book with such thickness to it, Jesse wondered how the little man managed to pick it up. The book touched down on the desk and the woodwork groaned under its weight. It was about as thick as Jesse's waist and easily fifty pounds.

Charles opened the book, the gem trimmed cover hitting the table with a soft tap. "Old Builder's?" he thumbed through the index, "Old Builders..."

"Yes,"

"Don't rush me Steve,"

"I wasn't-"

"Shh!" Charles stopped on a page, "Old Builder's. Here we are." He pulled out a piece of scrap paper and wrote down a list of books and names. "All mentions of Old Builder's are in these journals."

"Thanks Charles."

"Hmmmph."

Steve grabbed the paper.

Charles stopped him, "Oh and Steve?"

"...Yes?"

"Do put them back this time."

Steve chuckled, "Alright Charles,"

As they left the librarian desk, Steve patted Jesse on the shoulder, "Find us a big empty table - cause we're gonna need it - and I'll start getting the books." then he split.

Jesse moved to a back corner, that was where the only empty table was. It was quieter in this part of the library, quiet for a library anyway. It was far from the hushed whisperings of youth, and the noises of disgust that occasionally came from Charles. And as well maintained as the building and the books contained in it were kept, there was still minor dust in the isolated corner of the building.
This section was clearly not used often.

He took a moment to admire the books against the wall. They were labeled with a long fancy name that Jesse couldn't even begin to pronounce. The first book was thick, and very old, the leather long faded and crinkled. They gradually got newer, and the binding changed, till he finally reached the end- there was a gap.

It was then Jesse noticed that there was a small sign, but he couldn't-

Steve dropped ten books onto the table, earning him an audible growl from Charles all the way at the front of the building. Jesse jumped and whipped around, facing the male. "Is that all of them?"

"No," Steve puffed out, "But I'd thought this would be a good start. No point in getting discouraged."

"And ten books isn't?" Jesse smiled.

"Naw, that's easy. How fast can you read?"

Jesse joined him at the table, taking a chair across from him. "Pretty fast. Hey, um, I have a question."

"Hmmm?"

He pointed a thumb to the book case behind him, "Why is there a book missing, and what is the sign for?"

Steve looked over his shoulder, "Oh? That?Well, all those books belong to the oldest family in the village. Every patriarch in that family had kept their life journal there. The first book is supposed to belong to one of the first settler's here."

"So it belongs to the First?"

"No, it belongs to the people who came after him."

"Oh..." Jesse glanced at the empty spot, "There seems to be a gap."

"There is," Steve explained, "It belongs to the last member of the family. Unfortunately she had some sort of mental breakdown over a decade back. She took her journal, and tore out various pages from the others, gathered her family and left through the Portal. The elder's decided to be respective of the books and put that no touch sign on them till they can repair the damage inside."

Jesse looked sharply at Steve, "You mean, she left this world?! They haven't come back?"

Steve shrugged, "Yeah, there is no law last I checked that forbids you from leaving the world you were born in," he chuckled, "Or else you and your friends are in some serious trouble. Anyway, we all assume she left and decided not to come back. I guess she's living on a new world now, and as long as they are good with her being there that's fine. Now let's get to reading!"

They both immediately flipped open a book and Jesse froze quickly after, "Um..."

"What's wrong?"

"I don't..." Jesse stared at the letters with reddening cheeks, "I can't read it..."

"You can't- oh wait- do you not know the language?"
Jesse slowly nodded. "Now I get to sit here and be useless."

Steve thought on this, then his eyes lit up, "I got it," he shoved the majority of the books of the side, then proceeded to pull out a map that covered half the table. "Can you read longitude and latitude?"

"Yes,"

"Alright," Steve grinned, "Now one thing I know is that to the Old Builder's, longitude and latitude is very important. That way they could always find their doors, they probably did the same to their temples and caches. So I'll read through the books and find the markers, then you find it on the map."

Jesse felt a little better with that idea, "Sounds good."

"Cool," Steve quickly scanned through the first log, "And we're in luck, this one has a location on it already. So find-"

"Steve?"

"Yeah?"

Jesse smiled at him, "Thanks."

Steve stared for a second, and then smiled brightly back, "No problem kiddo. Now find longitude..."

"Careful, slippery here,"

Lukas switched the torch to his other hand and stepped around the slippery stone, which would have led to a easy fifty foot plummet down, "Swamps an odd place to build a temple. I thought you said it was a desert"

Alex had taken off with Petra and Lukas via horseback, shortly after Steve and Jesse had started off to the village. It was nearly two hours on horse, but they managed to get there in good time.

Lukas wasn't exactly encouraged to see a rotting building made of wood in swampy waters right in the middle of what should have been a Notch hot desert. Would anything still be useful and intact in such an awful place?

"Well it was last time I was here," Alex said, hoping over a broken gap in the stone stairs. The temple itself was nothing miraculous or fancy, but it went down deep. "Of course, last time I was here, it was rigged with TnT."

"What?!"

"Relax, I've removed the traps by this point," she stepped around a leaking ceiling point and the tiny waterfall it created. "It has been pretty rainy this year, perhaps the desert got a few flash floods."

"Maybe," Petra ducked a broken beam, "I wonder why they just didn't build their temple in the abandoned village where the door is."

"They didn't know it would end up there, so they built temples all over this world hoping one of them would be close."

"You seem to know a lot about the door," Lukas said.

"I've read my history on them yes," Alex answered, "Before the Old Builder's the only one who
could travel worlds was the First, or Notch himself."

"How did the Immortal do it?"

"They say that an Immortal never truly dies," the woman explained, "That he 'reswaps' or is reborn elsewhere. Somewhere along the way the First figured out how to do it freely from the Ender dragons."

"Ender dragons?!" Petra asked, "How?"

"Well, the Immortal has taken out a few in his day," Alex said, "But after awhile he began studying them. Tell me, have you ever fought one?"

"Can't say we have," Lukas said.

"Well have you heard of the bright light that comes when they die?"

"They leave an egg behind yes."

"Well, turns out. The End Portal is an entrance to an Ender Dragon's nest in that dimension. They go to different worlds to lay their eggs. You see Notch created the Ender Dragon with the skill to travel the multi worlds. The First figured it out, that bright light is them leaving that certain dimension. The only time an Ender dragon actually dies, is if there is a corpse left behind. The Immortal learned this when he scarred a dragon in battle, and later thought he killed it. But when they met again on the field of combat and he saw that scar he started to figure the white light was more than a death rattle."

"So how did the First do it?"

"He harnessed magic, deep and powerful magic," Alex said, "Took it from the very earth, and he created a portal. It's called the Immortal's Gate. And it gave him the ability to safely leave this world."

*Immortal's Gate.*

*Brine wasn't lying,* Lukas thought, "Alex, where is this gate? If the Immortal started here, it should be here. We could use it to get home."

"It was hidden long ago," She said softly, "Buried deep away, never to be used again. Sadly even if it was available, the user cannot control your Destination. Only an Immortal can."

"Oh..." he tried not to sound too disappointed.

Petra piped up, "So, what happened next?"

"The First realized that he alone should not have the privilege to travel these worlds. But how? Mortals couldn't use the gate. So he gathered," she paused to open a door, "This is the vault. Anyway he traveled all across Notch's creations and brought together dozens of people, and using their collective knowledge, brought it here. Then the First and the Old Builders of the First World began building temples across this world, places they hoped the magic was deep and strong. The doors were a lot different then you see, you couldn't build it just anywhere. When the magic was created to make the door, it appeared in the old village. Which is why there are no temples near it, save for the one they built around it."

"Fascinating, so the First founded the Old Builders." Lukas hummed, as he opened a chest, "Your story would explain why the temple wasn't as ruined as the village."
"No one had been up there to the mountain till the door was formed," Alex admitted. "Things that are part of the First's history are sacred and usually left untouched except by him."

"Guys I think I found something," Petra said, the other two joined her as she pulled a book out of a dusty old trunk. "But I can't read it," she handed it to Alex.

"It's in old tongue," Alex skimmed the first few pages, "But we're in luck, this is a list of some the first doors they created. Gotta love Old Builder's they were so unorganized, they left books everywhere."

"I doubt ours was part of that group though." Lukas sighed.

"No, but they have which ones are which, we can cross reference it with your map and mark off them as no go's."

Petra whistled, "That is good news."

Lukas grinned, because that had to be the most progress they made in awhile. It was refreshing for a change. He now looked at this mission with a new sense of hope. Having Steve and Alex was indeed the best plan yet.

Whatever plan number that was.
A witch cackled somewhere outside.

Aiden looked over his shoulder, relieved that the magical maniac hadn't followed him into the small entrance.

Fighting a potion throwing witch in tight unstable quarters wasn't ideal.

Aiden carefully ducked under a broken beam, using his hand as gentle support to ensure it didn't decide to drop on his head at that very moment. The burnt wood left ash on his fingers. He brushed it off on his jeans, disgusted with himself.

If there was a way to build a time machine and warn his younger self that destroying Sky City would kick him in the ass later on, he'd do it. But then again his ass of a younger self wouldn't listen probably. So Sky City was stuck as it was, a husk of its former glory and Aiden struggling to get inside.

Aiden moved into Isa's ex-library. He kept an eye out for spawns in the dark room and slowly made his way to the first desecrated bookshelf...

Aiden had been at his regular lunch with Isa when he brought up the update on Jesse and the gang, "So Lukas says the First is a really big deal in that world and he-"

Isa set down her cup of tea, "Wait did you sat the 'First' as in the Immortal? Notch's first human?" she asked.

Aiden looked at her funny, "You too huh? Yeah why?" he frowned, "Do you seriously think the Immortal is real?"

"Well...I have - had, books." Isa said slowly. "A Journal actually. It was a collection of notes and entries. Someone left them on my doorstep one night. I don't know who. But I could feel like they were important. I know that sounds like complete balderdash, but I could just feel it. They were full of lore and tales of Notch. Some of them were even about the First and the other Immortal."

"Other? Do you mean the Healer?"

"No...a different one." she sighed and waved her hand, "I never finished reading it. But I kept them in a hidden chamber within my main library. It was my private collection so to speak, something the rest of the town didn't know about. I unfortunately was never able to finish as I said before."

"What happened to them?"

"I lost them when Sky City fell. I didn't want to burden you - oh don't be sorry Aiden please- I didn't want to burden your friends with finding such trival things such as books when we need food and shelter."

Aiden sighed, "I'm the reason Sky City burned to begin with Isa. You should have told me."

"They're just books Aiden..." she soothed.

Aiden thought for a moment, pondering over a tugging sensation in his gut, "Yes, but you did say they felt important." he looked at her, "Where is the secret room located?"
"One, two, three, four..." Aiden mumbled, running his hands along the former library's bookshelves. The fires had done quite a number on the place. The wood was burnt and bent and most of the books had been reduced to ash.

"Eight."

Aiden stopped and gently pulled the select charred knob that used to serve as a decoration for the once lavish bookshelf. But it was more than a knob as he had just learned from Isa, it was the door entrance to the hidden library.

There was a click, then a soft pop.

Aiden pulled again.

The sudden movement of air currents sent dust and soot drifting everywhere. He covered his mouth with his spare hand, careful not to inhale. Last thing he needed was a coughing attack to alert all the spawns he was in the building.

The bookshelf slid away from the wall, it scuffed painfully loud against the wood floor. The ground once polished and smooth was now rough and uneven, the shelf barely able to move across it. Aiden assumed it probably once moved like clockwork, and probably looked seamless. He had seen some of Isa construction designs, and honestly did believe that she built Sky City up to be effective as can be.

With a effort and a heavy grunt, Aiden managed to get the secret door open just enough. He squeezed through the small opening, having to suck in his gut just to fit.

"Come on, come on!"

The witch laughed again, Aiden swore she was closer.

"Come on!"

Then with a deep breath followed by a massive exhale, Aiden pushed. He squeezed past the wood, feeling his body compressed for the briefest of seconds, before he stumbled into the hidden library.

He was in.

He quickly closed the door behind him, careful not to let it lock. He didn't need spawns walking in here while he rummaged.

Aiden lit a torch. The secret room held up significantly better than the rest of the floating island. The fires had been stooped short on the iron support beams leaving only the edges of the walls burned. It was a lovely room, with two comfy chairs, and plush carpet. There were only three bookshelves. But they were large and packed to the brim with volumes of books, with varying degrees of size and thickness. There had to at least be a hundred, at minimum...

Isa's private collection.

She obviously kept them well maintained and organized. Everything was alphabetized and she even marked title-less ones with her own labels for future study.

Aiden walked over, nearly snagging his foot on the old carpet. Grumbling at his clumsiness, he reached the books and leaned in. Not too close though. No point in the books surviving only to be burnt by his own torch.
Aesop's Fables.

Brimstone and Fire.

Dracula.

Grimm's Fairy Tales

King Solomon's Mines.

War of the Worlds.

It just keeps going, Aiden thought.

He pulled War of the Worlds off the shelf, pausing briefly to blow the dust off the front. He was disgusted at the sight of the gruesome art on the cover. Humans were struggling in vain against monstrous creatures in horrid devices that Aiden didn't recognize.

Was this someone's history?

He quickly put the book back and resumed his search. He pulled off a book with Isa's labeling on it, "Maybe this is-" he flipped open the book and froze. Aiden was a fast reader and the contents on the page were quickly absorbed, "Oh gross! Why the hell does she have this?!" he slammed the cover shut and looked at Isa's label.

Fifty Shades of Grey. It was followed by the side note - (What is this deplorable literature? Burn as soon as wood is plentiful. I'd throw it off, but winter is coming and we need something for warmth. This will have to do.)

Aiden threw the book over shoulder, knowing Isa wouldn't mind.

He kept on looking, more careful to read the labels this time around.

No journal...

Aiden stepped back, confused. Had Isa misplaced it somehow?

Then, from the corner of his eye, he spotted it. A golden glint, on the spine of a leather bound book, it rested alone on one of the dusty love seats on the opposite side of the chamber.

Could it be?

He hurried across the room and picked it up. It was old, at least parts of it anyway the pages ranged from faded yellow to a cleaner white. But the whole thing was surprisingly well put together and for the most part in excellent condition. There was faded print on the spine, it could have been a name at one point. Aiden turned to look at the cover, it simply stated: The Creation. Isa's notes on the inside of the hard cover left little information on what it was about.

Is this actual documentation or some story teller's fantasy? Will analyze.

Aiden flipped open the book, it was thick and heavy. Lots of writing contained on the inside...

Aiden was immediately drawn in by the flowing script. He sat down on the love seat and mounted the torch on the table. His mind briefly pulled away from the tension of the spawns.

In the beginning, there was only Notch...
Lukas drew back his bow, and fired.

It hit the target, but missed the center by about a foot.

"Shoot."

"Oh don't be that way. You're not a bad shot,"

Lukas jumped, turning sharply to see Alex casually leaning against the back porch railing. She had her own bow and a quiver full of arrows around her hip, "You've got the right posture and everything," she said.

Lukas blushed, "Um, thanks. Uh...I'm sorry, was I not suppose to use these?" he pointed at the targets. "I just thought I'd practice.

Alex looked at them, "Wouldn't be much use for them if we didn't."

"Yeah, I guess that makes sense."

Alex stepped off the porch, "Of course, it's not just the archer, the weapon is important too, and," she stuck out her hand, "May I?"

Lukas passed it to her, "Sure,"

The female inspected it, running her fingers along the grain, "Did you make this?"

"No, I took it from a Skeleton Archer."

"Not the best make then,"

"Haha, no not really." he laughed.

"You've taken good care of it though." she inspected. "I can see that you put a lot of time an effort into repair."

"Thanks."

Alex handed it back, "I always believe that the things you make yourself and for others have a special touch to them. The more heart and soul you put into your work, the finer it will be."

"Did you make yours?"

"I did," she gave it to him.

Lukas ran his fingers along the fine grained wood. Alex had made it beautifully, from the curve of the weapon, all the way down to the intricate carvings in the handle. "It's amazing," he smiled, "What wood is this?"

"Madagascar Rosewood," Alex explained, "The tree can only be found on one island here in this world. I'm sure it's abundant somewhere else. But I can only find it on the island here. It's the finest wood I've found so far for bows. Just enough bend, and plenty of power."

"And the string?"

Sinew and rawhide."
"Impressive," Lukas handed it back, "Did you craft it or..."

"Hand carved," Alex said proudly. "This one is fairly new; I haven't broken it in yet."

"I must have taken you forever to make it,"

"About two month's yes." she paused, and then handed it back out, "Would you like to try it?"

Lukas's eyes went wide, "Are you sure? I couldn't-"

"Yeah, give it a shot! You're about the same height as me, it should fit you perfectly."

He slowly took it, "Thanks,"

Alex dropped the quiver next to him, the flat bottom keeping the bag upright, "Don't forget to breath," she smiled.

Lukas reached down and pulled out an arrow- "Are these diamond arrowheads?!"

"Yes."

"Where did you get these?!"

"I made them," the adult female simply stated. "They can be reused as many times as a diamond sword, and as long as you don't lose the target you killed them with, you can retrieve them."

"That's amazing Alex! And they're enchanted!" Lukas looked at her, "What enchantment did you put on them?!"

"Oh..." she looked off, "They hurt evil things..." she returned her gaze to him, "Give it a shot."

"You have a lot of time on your hands to make these," he laughed.

"Eh," she grinned and shrugged, "More than most I guess."

Lukas notched an arrow and drew the string back, immediately feeling the power in the resistance. He released, the arrow shooting across the hundred foot clearing in seconds, so fast it didn't even whistle. It embedded itself into the target; it went deep enough to go half way up the shaft.

He whistled impressed by the power, but frowned as he noticed how far away from the bull's-eye he was. "It's strong. But I still can't aim apparently."

"Am I making you tense?" Alex asked instead of acknowledging his statement.

"Huh?"

"You need to relax, am I making you tense up?"

"N-no," he stammered out, "I'm fine it's just..."

Alex tilted her head.

Lukas blushed, "Okay so maybe I'm trying to show off. You and Steve are a little...eh," he looked away, "Intimidating. I mean when I first met your husband he killed a fifteen foot plus high spider and then just acted like he squashed a little gnat-"

Alex burst into a fit of laughter, "I'm glad you got a better first impression than I did!"
Lukas looked at her confused.

The ginger smiled. She scooped down and grabbed Lukas's bow, "We'll keep practicing and I'll tell you about about." she grabbed an arrow and drew back, "When I first met my husband...I shot him in the ass."

"What?!"

"Yep, mistook him for a zombie. His own damn fault for wearing blue and green..."

One shot turned into two, two to ten, ten to dozens and so on. And Lukas found himself at ease listening to Alex's tales, recalling her adventures and the things she did before she met Steve.

They kept shooting arrows, and soon Lukas was telling his own stories. Alex was a good shot, hitting the bulls eye or close to it almost everytime. But he never really was bothered by it. He was too busy having fun. They kept it up for an hour, maybe two, pausing only to retrieve their arrows and go again.

"...And then..." Lukas laughed, "After telling me nothing interesting happened. A giant fifty foot python appears outside his kitchen window!"

Alex laughed, "I wish I could have seen his face!"

"It was priceless!" he grinned releasing his arrow.

"Bulls-eye," Alex said.

Lukas actually took notice of the target then, the last dozen or so shots had all hit center.

"See? Relaxed. Someone once taught me the best way to relax is to think about good and pleasant things, things that soothe you. Always think positive, even in battle or hard times."

Lukas smiled, "Thanks Alex," he said, "I... I had a really good time today. It was," he looked at the bow, "It was nice to be happy for a change."

The female smiled, "I'm glad, I had a lot of fun too. Now" she pointed to the woods, "Could you shoot the zombie on the other side of the wall for me please? That's where my raspberries are and I rather not have him trample them."

"Sure," confidant Lukas finds his target and fires.

Someone yelps.

Lukas nearly drops the bow, as Steve hops the stone wall holding the arrow, "Alex!" he hollers.

"What were you doing back there?" Alex hollers back.

"Getting raspberries for dinner! Like you asked!" he steamed.

On the other side of the wall, Jesse starts laughing.

"I'm so, so, so, so sorry!"Lukas panics, "Oh Notch! I didn't know it was you! I-I'm sorry!"

Steve points the arrow at him, "That was you?"

Alex burst into a fit of giggles. "We thought you were a zombie hun. Quit wearing green a blue
Steve lets out an exasperated huff, and then look Lukas up and down, "Good shot," he says. Before he stabs the arrow into the target and returns back over the wall.

"I could have killed him!" Lukas squeaked.

"He's just being dramatic," Alex said, crossing the clearing to grab the arrows. "Relax. Let's go wash up for dinner and laugh about it later okay?"

"...Kay," Lukas extends the bow as she refills the quiver. "Here, you go."

Alex looks up at the wooden bow, "Keep it," she says.

"What?!"

Alex picks up the skeleton bow, "You broke it in,"

"I couldn't-" Lukas protests.

Alex held up her hand, "You got a long road ahead of you Lukas. I want to know you are armed with something that will keep you safe." She points at the arrow hole riddled targets, "I know you can use it, and I know it won't break. And that gives me comfort. Please, keep it."

Lukas looks at the bow then back at Alex, "Thank you."

She pats him on the shoulder, "You're welcome..." then turns and goes towards the house.

Lukas lingers, looking at the carefully made bow and arrows. He can feel the truth in Alex's words. Her heart and soul vibrates through every fiber of her work of art and she gave it to him. Lukas, feeling a overwhelming sense of emotion, pulls his gifts close, and follows her into the house.

"Can you get the last basket?" Steve calls.

"How many raspberries do we need?" Jesse laughs as he jumps off the porch.

"A lot," Steve says, "This is the last batch before winter sets in and Alex likes to can. You don't mind do you?"

Jesse walks backwards away from the house, "You just don't want to get shot at again do you?"

Steve grins and disappears into the house.

Smiling Jesse turns and dashes around the wall, scooping up the last basket of sweet smelling fruit. He takes a moment to look around, admiring the sunset, and the amazing 'First' world around him. He takes a deep breath.

_I wish Olivia and Axel could see this_, he thinks. _Maybe we'll stop by here with Ivor when he gets better? I'm sure he'd love it here._

"Jesse! Hey!"

He turns, just in time to see Petra jogging up, a basket in hand, "Hey Petra, did you get all the stuff Steve sent you to get already?"
"Yeah, everyone in town is really helpful," Petra lifted the lid, "They all want to make sure we're comfortable while we search. The baker lady even gave us a free pie!" she laughed.

"That's awesome!"

"I have good news," she beamed.

"What?"

"Do you remember Brine?" Petra says.

Jesse paused, "The old man who helped you and Lukas and accidentally sent you into a spider's nest?"

"Yep, well water under the bridge!" Petra says happily, "Cause I ran into him outside of town and guess what?"

"What?" Jesse asks.

Petra is smiling, "He might have a way to get us home,"

" Seriously! How!"

"He says he found a book on the Immortal's Gate."
"Why does he live so far away?"

"He's a hermit Jesse.....I think." Petra answered.

Jesse, Lukas and Petra were currently on their way to Elder Brine's house. Jesse had yet to meet this Elder Brine. But from the combined pieces of information provided by Lukas and Petra; he knew the man was very old, mostly blind, and knew a lot about the portal's and the *Immortal's Gate*. But most importantly he wanted to help, which was just fine by Jesse.

Unfortunately, he lived very, very, deep into the forest, per directions given to Petra.

"It's not that far," Lukas said slowly.

Jesse swatted a branch away that moments before had greeted him with a slap to the face, "Far enough for us to be axe murdered."

"If he wanted to do it Jesse," Petra said, "He would have done it when we met." even though out loud she'd never admit that Brine did, give her some unease to be around. Maybe it was his mysterious old ways?

Steve and Alex were hitting a cache today that was particularly far away from town, and apparently dangerous. Which is why they were not currently traveling with the youth.

Steve had taken one look at the point on the map and simply said, "Ah."

"What?" Jesse had asked.

"Alex and I will hit this by ourselves we think."

"Why?"

"It's um, on very dangerous terrain."

"What kind of-"

"Lava fields, a constantly burning plain that occasionally shoot off geysers of hot steam and sometimes lava. It's hot enough to burn the skin off your bones."

"You can't go to that!" Jesse protested.

"I've crossed it before, but I'd hate to see you kids get hurt on it." Steve said, "No point in finding home if you get killed looking for it."

"We'll be fine, we promise." Alex assured.

"We have someone else here who is offering to help," Petra said, "He says he has a book for us, we can go to him?" She suggested.

"Well, you go to him," Steve said, "And Alex and I will go to the temple and dig around. We'll meet back here about, say...seven?"

"Eight." Alex corrected.
Steve looked at the map, "Fine, eight work for everyone?"

Petra looked at the map Steve had given her earlier this morning. "We're almost there."

"Are you sure this is even a trail?" Jesse frowned. "I can barely see the path."

"Oh, quit whining!" Petra said.

"I'm not whining! I just want to make sure we're on the right path and..."

Petra rolled her eyes and tuned him out. She'd prove she was right here pretty soon and everyone would get a good laugh out of it - especially her. She lowered her map, "Jesse we'll be-

Amethyst.

Petra froze. "Oh-"

A screech tore through the trees like a knife, shaking the leaves and freezing the two approaching males in their place.

Petra saw the body lifting, rising- over her-

"Jesse watch out- augh!"

The enderman flew out of the bushes like a screeching nightmare, knocking Petra to the dirt. Jesse himself was knocked onto the ground before he knew what had truly hit him. The breath was easily snatched from his lungs on impact.

The enderman was huge, for an enderman anyway. Over seven feet in height, with long limbs and strong muscles. It's aura glowed in the thick cloud of black and purple, saturating the air with a suffocating rage. The trademark screams of the creature rattling in their ears.

"Jesse!" Petra and Lukas cried.

The enderman raised its hands high, fists clenched, if only for the briefest of moments, before it came swinging down with the force of a wrecking ball.

"Nooo!"

Jesse flinched, and the fists came down, hitting either side of his head and leaving a crater in the dirt.

The monster retracted it's arms, screaming in rage, and swung down again. The spawn was heavy, and close, Jesse didn't have much advantage to move and much time to react a second attempt. Still the creature missed.

Lukas recovered from his blowback of the creature, and with the fastest of his reflexes drew back an arrow and fired.

The arrow embedded itself deep into the shoulder of the creature, and immediately the skin bubbled and smelled burnt as if touched by acid. The enderman roared in rage, swinging a stray arm at Lukas before launching clean off Jesse. He soared over the treetops above and mysteriously vanished.

It didn't return...There was a second of silence, perhaps two more. Then sound returned to the woods, birds chirped, frogs croaked, and all was well save for the three stunned youth.

"What the hell?!" Petra gaped, scrambling up.
Lukas was already kneeled down next to Jesse - who was still gasping - "Jesse are you alright?!
"Y-yeah." the brunet managed to squeak out.

"Did you dodge the second time? Did he hit you?"

Jesse shook his head, "No um, uh" he swallowed a few times, "He missed."

Petra stabbed her sword into the ground and leaned into it for stability, her heart pounding, "Well consider yourself lucky, he was right on top of you, kinda hard to miss."

Jesse nodded, but he clearly looked bothered, "Yeah..."

Petra reached down and helped him up, "What I don't understand is why he went for you and not me, even though I'm the one who made eye contact."

"Remember the one by the cabin?" Lukas pointed out, "He attacked you even though you didn't look at him, maybe they don't go by eye contact here."

"Maybe..." Petra shook her head, "Notch he was huge. Not as big as the one that Jesse was nearly sacrificed to, but damn he was big. Did he look bigger to you guys?"

Jesse scoffed, "You should have seen from under him. Talk about perspective-" He looked at Lukas, "What kind of enchantment was on your arrows?"

Lukas was inspecting said diamond arrowheads at the moment, "You know, Alex wasn't actually specific on what they did."

"Well we have to thank her, because it scared him off."

Petra looked around the forest, now in a great wave of unease, knowing there was a very large, very angry, enderman out there. "Come on let's go, I don't want to be standing around when he comes back - if he decides to."

The boys didn't argue.

They walked for about another hour, eventually coming to a steep incline.

"I hate hills," Lukas huffed.

"You hate all environments," Jesse laughed, even though he was puffing a little too.

"Brine said he lived on a ridge," Petra recalled. "We're close now."

"You...ugh...said...that...a...hour ago!"

Petra didn't quite hear who said that, so she just looked over her shoulder and gave them both a look. "Wimps."

Suddenly they broke free of the forest, coming out on a steep hill, which cut down into a cliff on the far side. It was tall grass and rolling meadows beyond that. Behind them the forests and to the west the volcano, and east the mountain village. At the top of a path, resting not too far from the cliff and tucked in amongst the meadow grass, was a small hut.

"There."
"Wow," Jesse hummed, "He really does live far from town."

"Guess he likes his privacy," Lukas observed.

Jesse swung open the fence gate, built between two trees, "Perfect for murders." he teased.

"Shut up." Lukas shot back with a smirk.

She almost didn't hear it, but Petra had practiced most her life listening for the little things. There was click, then the whirr of gears, followed by the faint smell of redstone burning. Petra's eyes went wide.

_Oh no. Not again._

An arrow shot out of a innocent looking box stacked up against the house-

An arrow dispenser!

It was a trap gate!

"Jesse!"

"You're an idiot," Ivor scolded.

"Hey! I lived, didn't I?"

"Barely!"

Aiden sat at his kitchen table, vigorously rubbing his hair with a towel, his clothes damp and shoes soaked.

Ivor sat across from him, sporting the look of death.

So effective was the look, a lesser person - or perhaps a _smarter_ person- would have backed down by this point. But if looks could kill, Aiden would be on his twentieth consecutive death by this point.

The journal Isa had told him about had engrossed Aiden a little _too_ well. It had become dark before he knew it, time had flown by as he read. But he didn't realize the sun had gone down until an enderman had warped into the room by accident.

Needless to say both parties had been thoroughly surprised, neither expecting to see each other. Aiden had thrown his torch out of poor judgment and unexpected shock it had been so startling.

The result- was an enderman freaking out, a screaming Aiden, and half the carpet on fire all while the pair ran circles around each other.

The good and obvious news was that Aiden got out of the room in one piece.

The _better_ news, Fifty Shades of Grey burned in the mayhem.

But he'd tell Isa that later...

Aiden had rushed outside to see the sun long gone and Sky city over infested by spawns under the night sky. Aiden's route down to solid ground therefore had been cut off.
So...he jumped.

It seemed like the last logical thing to do. And though definitely not a favored method he did it anyway. And by some miracle managed to land in the lake even though it was dark, all while still keeping the journal in hand.

Ivor had not been - and still wasn't - pleased. "You're an idiot." he repeated.

Wordlessly, Aiden threw the journal onto the table.

Ivor picked it up, "What is this?"

"It's a journal from Isa's hidden library."

"She had a hidden library?"

"Yes, it is a collection of writing's about Notch. I thought you might be interested."

Ivor flipped though the first few pages, then eyed Aiden mischievously.

Aiden stopped rubbing his hair and frowned at his temporary housemate, "What?"

"For a skeptic, this is a rather silly thing to be almost killed for."

Aiden rolled his eyes and pulled the towel off of his head, refusing to give Ivor even the slightest bit of satisfaction.

"How far along did you read?"

"Pretty far. I think the first few chapters are newer, written by someone who speaks the same language we do. Just before the enderman showed up, the journal's language changed. I don't know it, so I assume it's old..."

"Well you're not bilingual, obviously."

"But you know a few."

Ivor found the pages that were in a different language as Aiden had described, the book was indeed older here. As if the first chapters was an extensive intro into what the reader possessed. "It's in the old tongue."

"Can you read it?"

Ivor was smiling again, "Curious are we?"

"Can you read it or not?" Aiden asked again, slightly irritated. Because one, it was frustrating being teased, and two, yes, he was a little curious.

"I can read old tongue," Ivor said, "It's supposed to be the base for almost all human languages. It might take me awhile though, I'm rusty. What parts did you read in our language."

"Just the beginning, " the youth said, "It talked about the creation for a bit, and then the First-"

"Like a recap?"

"Sorta, but then it brought up the other Immortal."
"The healer?" Ivor asked.

Suddenly Aiden felt a little uncomfortable as a strange sudden sensation of uneasiness overwhelmed him, "No, the um, other one. The one you thought came between..."

"The Lost Immortal?" Ivor breathed out.

"Yeah, I guess."

"Aiden do you realize how important this is?!" Ivor waved the book in front of him. "There had never been official documentation of the true second Immortal and this could be it!"

"They are just stories though."

Ivor smiled at him, "Do you really believe that?"

Aiden looked at the book, "I...I don't know." He looked away, "It doesn't matter what I think, what does the book say in the old tongue?"

Ivor grinned and turned to the first page off the old manuscripts, he cleared his throat. "I have been gifted with life, created by a God, and given a language to speak and words to write. It is strange, knowing that before me and the others, there are none. We are the first mortals in this world, from us, all the nations will grow, and yet...we have so much to learn. Perhaps that is why Notch sent down his Hand..."

Jesse let his eyes glance to the side, and the arrow wobbling back and forth on the bark of the pine. He slowly looked back at his friends, not yet inside the gate line.

Lukas was pale, "Jesse?"

"I'm fine...that's just...the second time I've almost died today. Feeling kinda unlucky at the moment."

"Don't move." Petra said.

"Not gonna," he answered, his hand still gripped the gate open wide, he was afraid to move it. He looked back at the tree, seeing the green dripping off the point of the arrowhead.

Poison.

He almost took another poison arrow, this time to the face.

Whoever was his lucky guardian must be demanding retirement by now.

"What do we do?" Lukas said.

"Oh I am so sorry!" a voice cut through the tension. Jesse looked to the house just in time to see a bent over old man pull the lever by the arrow dispenser. "If I had known you children would have been this early, I would have turned my fence off, I'm sorry!"

"Brine," Petra breathed out, "You didn't tell me your house was rigged."

Brine looked up and Jesse immediately felt uncomfortable by the toothy smile and the lack of ability to see the other eyes, "I usually use the side gate Petra, I haven't had guests in a long time and simply forgot about the traps. You can come in now, it's off."
Jesse held the gate open and Petra and Lukas entered the property.

Brine stepped off the porch to greet them, "I'm glad you could make it."

"Thank you for helping us," Lukas said, "Um, you haven't met Jesse." he gestured.

"Jesse the unlucky one with the arrow, glad to see you live," Brine extended his hand.

"Thanks for helping my friends find me," he answered, taking the elder's hand. It was shockingly cold sending a wave of goose bumps up his arm and making his hair stand on end.

Brine immediately released his grip, "You have very warm hands." He chuckled.

Jessed rubbed his own hand, "And yours are cold."

"Well, I'm so glad you made it!" Brine clapped his hands together, almost giddy like a gleeful child, "But we're not here for chit chat, the Immortal's Gate is why we're here."

Brine led them into his house, a simple small cabin with very little furnishings, but crammed to the brim with hundreds of books.

"Brine we need to talk about the gate, Petra didn't get to bring up a few days ago," Lukas said, stepping inside and carefully not to knock any book piles over, "Alex - someone we're staying with - says only the Immortal can activate the gate."

"That is true."

"Then we can't use it," Jesse sighed, "We appreciate your help, but last I checked none of us are Immortal."

"Do you know why the Immortal is the only one today who can use it."

"Why?" Jesse frowned.

"Because he uses it by harnessing old magic. No one alive today knows how. That's why."

Jesse raised an eyebrow, "And you can?"

"I'm old enough," Brine stated simply, grinning at his small joke, "But I've found a book. As previously mentioned," He picked up a book from his desk, "If we can find the door, what I'm telling you is that I can open it for you."

There was silence.

"Didn't you tell me the door was sacred?" Lukas said softly. "It be rude to-"

"The door is sacred yes," Brine sighed, letting his cane tap a few times on the floor, "Which is why no one is looking for it. But there is no law saying it can't be used. We First worlders simply respect the Immortal and his things, but I'm sure if the Immortal were here, he wouldn't mind you using it. It's not for a bad cause after all.

Petra leaned against a chair, "So, if we find the gate we can use old magic, - the same magic that made the portals- to get home?"

"No," the elder said, "I harness the magic, and you go home." He tapped his fingers on the book, "This is a very old journal, and it has methods of harnessing the magic. It's in old tongue obviously
none of you can read it. But I can. I'm also older than you and more in tune with my natural world, it will be easier for me to use the magic than you. I know you feel uncomfortable, knowing that the gate is important. But I just wanted to present you with another option."

Lukas and Petra looked at Jesse.

Jesse stared at the book, "And all we would need to do is find the door?"

"The location is written in one of the ancestors books buried here." Brine said, "I'll find it eventually."

"We could help-"

"No, no, keep doing what you're doing." the other said, "That way you have a higher chance of getting home..." he raised an eyebrow, "Assuming you are okay with the method I have provided."

Jesse sighed and looked at Petra and Lukas, who both looked back at him for a decision, "I guess...another way couldn't hurt." he wasn't sure what made him so uncomfortable searching for this other portal, but he pushed the feeling away. He returned his gaze to Brine. "We appreciate you doing this."

Brine was already settling into his chair, "I will study, while you keep searching. I'll come find you once I have an update. May Notch bless our quest hmmm?"

Thunder rumbled in the distance. Almost like a response from the deity himself....

Steve and Alex were already at the farmhouse, by the time the trio got home.

"Any luck?" Steve asked, he had ash in his hair.

"We might have a lead," Jesse slid into a chair by the table, "He's looking into it."

"Great! The more the merrier!"

"How'd it go with you?"

"Well," Steve looked at Alex who snickered mischievously at the kitchen counter, "I'm not going to be wearing green and blue for awhile."

Jesse smiled. "Arrows?"

"No, Lava. Lost my shirt."

Jesse laughed.

"We found some more journals that labeled some doors," Alex explained.

"That's great!" Lukas said smiling.

"So what do we do next though?" Petra asked.

"Well, I want to go hit the temple in the sunflower fields," Alex said, "Be nice to go somewhere decent for a change."

"You had fun out there and you know it," Steve said.
"More than I have had in a long time," the female admitted.

"I'll go with you," Lukas said, "Sunflowers sound nice."

"I don't think you should go through Jesse, it's pretty far, a day or two away, and," Alex said turning her gaze to Jesse, "You look a little pale, your wound isn't going bad is it?"

"No," Jesse said, unaware of the weariness that seeped into him, "Just tired. Lots of stuff to do still."

"We'll get there," the female encouraged.

"I know."

She smiled, then excited the kitchen, "Lukas! Petra! Can you help me get some stuff from the pantry? I don't know about you, but I am starving!"

Steve leaned over Jesse pressing hands onto his shoulders as the rest left the room, "Hey,"

"Hey,"

"Would you like to come with me to the Hallway tomorrow, I need to mark off doors. The ones we know are bad. If you feel up for it?"

"Yeah, I think I can handle that," Jesse smiled softly.

"Good," Steve slid into the chair next to him, "Because I want to show you something,"

Jesse's curiosity was lit up in a instant, "What?"

Steve smiled, "You'll see."

'You'll see' was one of Jesse's least favorite phrases. But for once he was okay with it. If not for just this once...
He showed us much. He treats us as family and taught us everything that he had learned when he first arrived here. Yet, the Immortal, I sensed his loneliness, we all did.

Was he aware that compared to him, our lives were fleeting? Was he afraid to get too close to us?

The others and I pray, we pray every day, hoping. That Notch will find it in his heart to bring another to us. Someone for the Immortal.

No one should be alone after all...

"Sweet cheese and crackers I swear this hallway has its own weather!" Jesse stomped his feet and pulled his coat tighter. He had hoped escaping from the First World fall chill would happen upon entering the Hallway, but it was just as cold- if not colder- in the magical multi dimensional passage. He could see his breath for Pete's sake!

Steve laughed and zipped up his own coat, "Just as well, it's cold where we're going."

Jesse turned excitedly back to the male, "You gonna show me your secret?!" he smiled.

"Yep!" Steve walked about five feet then stopped. "This is it."

Jesse looked at him, confused, and then looked at the door at which Steve stood near. He recognized it, it was the one he and Lukas had been debating over going into or not before Petra had picked the First World. The stone was still obsidian, and the magic was still black, but frost had accumulated on the black stone, making white pieces of art dancing across the grooves. Jesse eyed the dark door suspiciously, "This is it?"

"This is it."

"Steve," Jesse awkwardly laughed, "It's just another portal."

The older male smiled, "But inside, is something only a handful of people have seen."

"Such as?"

Steve wiggled his hands to follow and leapt through.

"Steve!" Not wanting to fall behind Jesse ran though, hoping - a small part of his was anyway - that this wasn't where he was violently murdered.

It struck him about halfway through running into the magical portal that the last time he raced through one so fast was in Sky City. If he remembered correctly he almost fell to his death from the momentum and lack of solid ground on the other side...

Luckily there was ground on the other side, but he was going too fast to keep his balance or for that matter, stop, "Ahh!" Jesse tumbled through, kicking up dark purple dust as he fell forward.

"Shhh!"
He crashed into Steve, the adult caught and held him supportively in his strong arms, one hand quickly rushing to put a gentle finger on Jesse's lips. "Don't yell."

"Why?" Jesse whispered after he pulled his lips away. He took a second to look around. It was hard to see, there was only one torch in the room, and from what Jesse could tell, it was the only room. He felt like he was in a cave. It was small, no windows, no natural light. The stone was a dark rich purple, nearly black, and from what Jesse determined that was it for the small chamber. It was the room; the portal, him and Steve, and a set of stairs leading off and up into a dark void. "Where are we?"

"Shhhh," Steve helped him straighten. "You'll startle them."

"Them?" he coughed on the black particles in the air, the atmosphere was almost stifling.

Steve gently grabbed his hand, bringing a finger up to make a silent shush, "Follow me and stay low."

Jesse resisted, because truthfully, he wasn't exactly feeling his bravest at the moment. He was swept up in a sudden and unnatural wave of fear, "Steve, where are we?" he asked again.

Steve caught the desperation in his voice and turned back to him, "I know this isn't your world. But this is something I thought you might like to see. I really rather show you it," then he added, "And frankly, not have you stumble in here by accident."

Jesse didn't move.

Steve placed his free hand on his shoulder, "Jesse, you can trust me. I'm not going to let anything happen to you."

Jesse paused, feeling the sensation of trust kick back in and then nodded, he let Steve guide him up the stairs and out into the open. It was dark, nothing but nearly pitch black void all around. Yet the whole terrain seemed to glow, by some unnatural light. "What-

Steve gently shushed him and led him around a corner of rock towards the dark black cliffs that led to nothing. "Come see."

Jesse looked, and he felt his breath taken away," Steve..." he knew where he was, but he didn't understand how this could be possible, "Is this...the End?"

Steve nodded, smiling. "I thought you'd be amazed," he whispered, "I've wanted to show you this ever since Alex and I joined the search. Do you like it?"

Jesse stared nodding. Across the great vast expanse was another floating island. Atop resting on dozens of perches or on the ground, were hundreds if not thousands, of Ender Dragons, "What world is this?"

"Welcome to the Ender Dragon World."

Petra was packing her bags for the trip to the sunflower fields when it happened.

"Alex! Alex!"

Lukas looked up from his end of the room, he too was packing his bags and like Petra, he was equally confused.
Steve and Jesse had left for the Hallway shortly after breakfast - which had been very early- so that everyone could get a good start for their separate trips. It was only Alex, Petra and Lukas who remained at the reclusive farm house.

"That didn't sound like Jesse," Lukas said.

"It wasn't and I don' think it is Steve either," Petra answered. She tilted her head, "It kinda sounds like the blacksmith from town. What was his name?"

"I think it was Bach," the blond said, he looked towards the bedroom exit, "It sounded urgent.

"Alex, in Notch's good name please be here!"

"That sounded urgent," Lukas said.

Petra was already dropping her bags and hurrying out the bedroom, she raced down the stairs just as the main front door burst open. It was indeed Bach, looking a little pale and a little stressed for a man who was naturally intimidating. In his arms he carried a very sweaty and tense Mariah.

He immediately set his sights on Petra, "Please tell me Alex is here!"

"She's in the barn, with the-" Petra started.

"I'm right here Bach," Alex said, entering the parlor from the kitchen bits of straw and hay in her hair. She must have entered the house through the kitchen exit. "What's wrong?"

"I think... the baby is coming," Mariah wheezed out.

"But she still has months to go!" Bach stressed, "Two at least!"

"Calm down," Alex said soothingly, "When did the cramps start?"

"This morning,"

"Has your water broke?"

"I-I don't know."

"Bach, take her to the medical room please," she waited till Bach exited the parlor before she turned to Lukas and Petra, "We need to postpone the trip kids..."

"This is more important anyway," Petra said, "We'll be okay, right Lukas?"

"Oh yeah," the male agreed, "Can we help with anything?"

Alex looked towards her patient rooms, "Petra if you could get me some clean fresh towels that would be great. Lukas could you ah...keep Bach calm? He may bend iron to his will but he's as soft as cheese when it comes to his wife."

"No problem," Lukas trotted down the rest of the steps just as Bach exited the medical room, "Bach, would you come with me?"

"Mariah-"

"Alex is on it," Lukas gestured for him to follow, "Let's get you something to drink."
"Where are the towels?" Petra asked.

Alex was pulling off her work shirt, and shaking off the hay in her hair as she headed towards her doctor's office, "They are upstairs fourth floor, I just pulled some fresh ones out of the cleaning room." she smiled, "Thanks so much for this Petra," she said as she pulled her hair back.

"It's the least we could do!" Petra gave a thumbs up and dashed up the stairs.

The upper floor consisted of only two rooms according the house's owners. There was the cleaning room, which Alex said she did all her winter washing when it go too cold outside to do laundry. The other room was what they called the 'attic', because it was simply used as a catch all room for everything they owned.

Petra entered the cleaning room, spotted the basket of towels and had scooped them up and was out the door without hardly breaking stride-

A cool fall breeze wafted through the top floor and the attic door creaked open. Petra only stopped because she found it weird that the attic window was open. But then it struck her that Alex had been cleaning last night, she probably opened it to get some airflow.

The natural light illuminated the otherwise dark attic revealing the lost and hidden things buried there. Petra spotted multiple chest, some were cracked open, stuffed full of handmade quilts and other fabrics. There were a dozen or so racks of armor, varying from leather to iron. A rocking chair, a table covered in dusty old books, and a crib.

Petra paused, stepping into the musty room to inspect the piece of furniture. The crib seemed out of place in the house. She wasn't aware that Steve and Alex had children. There were a few quilts nicely folded in the crib, and some toys too. There were a few dolls, a carving of a pig, one of a creeper and another of a ghast. There was even a small wooden sword. Even though it was covered in dust, one could tell it was polished so smooth oil itself couldn't be slicker. The crib was gorgeous as well, hand carved, every piece assembled with the finest detail-

"Petra did you find them?!" Lukas hollered from four stories down.

Petra jumped slightly and quickly backed out of the attic, "Yeah coming!" she ran down the stairs, jumping two at a time and hurried past Lukas.

"She's already with Mariah," he said.

"Got it,"

Petra stepped much more carefully into the medical room, cautious not to make any loud noise and stress the mother to be further.

"...I was only cooking," Mariah groaned.

"You picked up that cauldron of yours didn't you?" Alex scolded, "I told you, you have to be careful Mariah."

"Oh that didn't start it," the brunette huffed.

"Last I check, that's how your mother went into labor with you," The ginger said, "You are pregnant; you need to take it easy."

"That didn't stop-"
Alex turned around; "Petra! Oh good, Lukas has already fetched me some warm water so now I can start." she scooped up a towel after Petra set the basket on the table, "Thank you."

"You're welcome," Petra looked at Mariah, "Are you hanging in there?"

The blacksmith's wife mumbled something in her native tongue but she gave Petra a genuinely bright smile, "Lovely."

"Do I need to bring the crib down too, just in case?" Petra said to Alex with the intention of her statement to be a mood lifting jest.

Alex seemed momentarily surprised almost stunned, which confused Petra "Crib?" then her eyes widened, "Oh the crib!" she laughed, "I'll keep you updated," she waved to Petra, "Just keep Bach calm for me okay?"

"Okay," Petra said letting Alex's previous expression slide, she waved to Mariah, "You got this!"

Mariah winced from her bed and waved back.

Lukas was already in the kitchen with Bach, the blacksmith drinking from a large mug.

"Lukas get you a drink?" Petra asked as she slid into a open chair.

"Whiskey in the cabinet," Lukas said slowly. He pointed to a high cabinet in the upper left hand side of the kitchen, "Bach knew right where it was,"

"Steve can't stand the stuff," Bach said, biting his lip, "But he kept a bottle here after he found out Mariah was carrying. Blighter says we should just stay in the guest bedrooms by this point."

"Have you been here a lot?" Petra asked.

"Unfortunately," the burly male sighed, he looked longingly at the medical room, "We've been trying for years...and now..."

"I'm sorry if it's hard for you," Lukas said quietly.

"Ah," Bach took a swig, "Don't be. We knew from the beginning it wasn't going to be easy. But Alex is good at her job, if she can't do it, no one can. She's our healer after all, and almost second mother to all them kids in town," he laughed.

Petra looked at Alex's room and her thoughts wandered to the crib.

It was many hours later before Alex exited, with Mariah, who was still pregnant.

"False alarm," Mariah laughed, "He has to be a boy luv, only a boy would do this to me."

"Only a girl could be so stubborn," Bach kissed his wife on the cheek.

"No more cauldron cooking," Alex said, washing her hands, "I recommend you stop lifting anything heavy in general. Stop going up stairs. I strongly suggest you move your bedroom to the bottom floor until this is over. Or," she turned to face the couple, "You could just stay here."

"We're not going to intrude," Bach said.

"You know the risks though,"
"Alex..." Mariah smiled, "We have faith."

Alex sighed and rubbed the bridge of her nose, "Of all the stubborn..." she mumbled, then, "Fine." she smiled. "Send a messenger next time, and I'll come to you."

"Thank you Healer," Mariah kissed Alex on the cheek, "We will."

Healer?

Petra tilted her head. Healer as in the second Immortal? She looked at Lukas and saw the blonde's gears were turning as well.

"Thank you again," Bach agreed.

Alex gave a cheeky grin as they went to leave, "Oh and Bach?"

The couple stopped.

"Why don't you take my horse and carriage back to town, since you decided to run all the way here."

Bach blushed a little, "Ah, yes..."

"It's already set up in the barn. Take it; I'll have Steve fetch it tomorrow."

"Thank you," Then the couple was gone.

Alex sat down on a chair slumping back over it with a sigh and pulled out her hair tie, "Well, how about we start the trip tomorrow and leave a note for the boys?"

"Sounds fine," Lukas said, he glanced at Petra, "Um, Alex?"

"Hmmm?"

"They called you Healer."

"Yes?"

"Like the uh..." Lukas was stuck.

"The Immortal," Petra finished.

Alex sat back up, resting her elbows on the table, "I'm a doctor, it's just one of my names."

"Oh..." Lukas blushed, "We thought - sorry."

"I'm honored though," Alex said, "Thanks for your help today."

"You're welcome," they answered.

She let her hands drop onto her thighs with a clap, "Well, better unhitch the horses."

"I'll help," Petra said.

"I'll take the towels upstairs." Lukas piped up.

The adult woman nodded wearily, "Sounds like a plan."
Lukas left the kitchen to head up the stairs and the women headed for the barn. Alex started to unhitch Titan, while Petra worked on Gaea.

Alex was singing a soft tune while they worked; it reminded Petra of a lullaby.

"...For you know, once even I was a
Little child, and I was afraid
But a gentle someone always came
To dry all my tears, trade sweet sleep for fears
And to give a kiss goodnight

Well now I am grown
And these years have shown
That rain's a part of how life goes
But it's dark and it's late
So I'll hold you and wait
Till your frightened eyes do close..."

Petra swallowed thickly, "Alex?"

"Yes-"

"Were you ever a mom?" Petra blurted out.

Alex stopped singing.

The ginger cautiously looked around the wide girth of the horse, to see Alex staring quietly at the leather straps in her hands. "Alex? I'm sorry if I-"

"No," Alex said, she looked to Petra smiling, "I'm not upset. To answer your question, No, I am not a mom." she returned to her work, "I tried to be once."

"What happened?" Petra said gently. Then she stammered out, "I mean you don't have to tell me-"

"Steve and I just can't," Alex answered softly, "Our lifestyle doesn't allow time for children. We wanted one once. But we decided, it...just wasn't safe. We didn't want to lose..." she trailed off, looking almost grief stricken.

"Oh...I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Alex said. "I assumed you asked because of the crib upstairs?"

"Yeah..." Petra mumbled.

Alex chuckled, "Understandable. I use that crib for when I deliver babies. Mariah is the first person in a long time to be with child, so it's been in the attic for awhile. I was going to bring it down when she was closer to being due but-" Alex shook her head, "With all these close calls I'm should just bring it down."

"I'll help," Petra offered.

"I'd appreciate that,"

Petra let the air returned to it content atmosphere, "You have a pretty singing voice for lullabies. I think you'd make a great mom."
Alex blushed a little, but Petra could see her eyes were sad, "I haven't sang in a long time actually."

"Well..." Petra scooted over and elbowed her, "I wouldn't mind hearing the rest of that song?"

"I wouldn't mind showing you," Alex smiled and returned to her melody:

"...And I hope that you'll know
That nature is so
The same rain that draws you near me
Falls on rivers and land
On forests and sand
Makes the beautiful world that you'll see
In the morning

Everything's fine in the morning
The rain'll be gone in the morning
But I'll still be here in the morning..."

"There is so many!" Jesse gaped.

"You see the big one right there?" Steve pointed, "The one with the scar on his snout."

Jesse followed Steve's finger to the large Ender dragon perched on a tower of end stone. The beast was massive, easily double the size of the rest of the dragons.

"Yeah?"

"That one right there is the Alpha male." Steve explained, "He's in charge of this herd."

"How many herds are there?"

"Oh, a few hundred I think," the older male answered, "There are at least fifty to a hundred dragons in each pack. But the big one right there, I call him Void, he's the biggest alpha I've seen so far."

"This is amazing!" Jesse was in awe, he crouched a little lower next to Steve, "Are you sure we're safe here?"

"Absolutely not,"

"What?!"

Steve laughed, "They already know we're here - calm down let me explain - Void has already sensed our presence. See? How his nose is pointed one way, but his right eye is facing us?" Steve leaned back against the rock, "He knows we're here but he knows we're not a threat."

"Are you sure?"

"I've been here a lot," Steve said, "He only attacked me once, and I figure he's got my scent memorized by this point. We can leave if you want; I just really wanted to show you this."

"No, no, I'm glad," Jess leaned back, having to kind nestle against the other male to keep from slipping off the edge, "This place is incredible."

"This was the second door the Old Builder's made," the adult said, "But apparently they made it from the outside so they had no idea what world they were entering. Imagine their surprise!"
Jesse chuckled but stopped, "The portal door is still there right?"

"Yeah, we won't have to traverse the dragon infested world I assure you." Steve replied, "The Old Builder's weren't very consistent in their door patterns. Some worlds have two, and entrance and an exit, some have only one, that goes both ways."

"Our world led to Sky City," Jesse explained, "But we couldn't go back, and when we went through the new portal it led us to the Hallway." he frowned, "I hope we don't have to go through a world to get to our world..."

"I'm sure you'll be okay."

There was a moment of silence, only the roar of the dragons on occasion.

"Lukas said the Immortal learned to off world travel from Ender dragons."

"Who told him that?"

"Alex,"

"Well, they're right," Steve looked across the expanse, "Somehow he managed to put the pieces together..."

"So, the Old Builder's learned from the First, and the First learned from the dragons," Jesse listed.

"So, we have the dragons to thank for this," Steve finished.

"Trippy,"

"Tell me about it."

"I can't wait to tell Olivia and Axel about this,"

"It's definitely a unique bragging right," Steve agreed, "How many people can say they saw the source world for all Ender Dragons?"

"I should probably bring Petra and Lukas here...you know...so it's fair," Jesse laughed.

"Just make sure they stay calm," Steve laughed as he stood, pulling Jesse up with him.

"Thanks for showing me this," Jesse said, as he followed Steve back down the stairs and into the portal. He paused for a brief seconds as the cool air of the hallway rushed to meet him, "It really puts the awe and wonder back into me,"

"You sound like a First Worlder," Steve laughed.

Jesse grinned, "Going native already I guess." he looked to another door in the hallway, the one with the claw marks and bloodstains. " Steve? Is that the next door they made."

"Yes,"

"What's in there? Do you know?"

Steve looked at the door and made a face, "Hell, I'm afraid. Well, it's a world entirely composed of Nether, but Hell is close enough."
"Oh..." Jesse looked around, "Any door for Heaven?"

"Gotta die to get to Notch."

"Unless you're Immortal," Jesse said with a chuckle.

Steve looked at the ceiling, "Unless your that," he scooped up his pack, "Come on kiddo let's go."

"Kiddo?" Jesse stopped.

Steve looked over his shoulder at the youth, "Oh! Uh, sorry!" he went pink in the cheeks a little, "I know people for more than two weeks I start giving them pet names." he adjusted his pack, "I can stop."

"No," Jesse picked up his own bag, "No, I don't mind." as he followed Steve down the hall, trying his best not to seem too happy with the nickname. It made him...happy.

*It's kinda nice...*
Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer:

Lullaby for a Stormy Night belongs to Vienna Teng

Art belongs to LunaDestiny
Thirty Four

Had my ancestors known what the second Immortal would become, would they have prayed for him? Would they have asked Notch to provide another for the First?

My people are dying, and Notch's world and his First, are broken...

Perhaps it would have been better; to live a life of eternity missing the many you briefly knew. Instead of having to kill the one you knew from their very first steps...

If only they had known.

They ended up staying later than planned and decided to camp at the temple instead of walking all the way home in the dark.

Jesse and Steve arrived at the farmhouse the following morning just as the sun was peaking over the horizon.

Lukas was in the barn, saddling one of the horses.

"Lukas? What are you doing here?" Jesse asked, surprised to see his friend.

The blonde whipped around, "Jesse! I was just about to go looking for you!"

Jesse accepted Lukas's hug then withdrew, "I thought you, Petra and Alex were going to go to the sunflower fields yesterday?"

"We were," Lukas explained, "But Mariah and Bach showed up, they thought the baby was coming," he waved to Steve whose face had twisted into an expression of alarm, "Don't worry it was a fake call. Bach also informed me to tell you to refill the whiskey stash."

"Of course," Steve relaxed and walked towards the house laughing.

"Anyway," Lukas continued, pulling the saddle off the horse and setting it over the pen railing. "It was late afternoon by the time they left so Alex decided we'd leave today." he followed Jesse back to the house, "But you and Steve didn't show up last night..."

"We ran a little late," Jesse admitted, "We took a few pit stops and Steve showed me a really cool world Lukas,"

Lukas gave him a stressed look, "Well, I, was worried. So I told Alex I'd stay here and give you two till sunup before I started searching the Hallway."

"You didn't have to worry," Jesse apologized, "But I'm sorry."

"It's okay," Lukas said, "Alex said you guys were probably fine, she said you and Steve could handle it. I just..." he sighed, "I don't mind splitting up, but would it kill you to be on time?"
Jesse patted the blonde on the back, "I'll try harder in the future."

"You better, I'm sick of worrying for you and Petra sometimes." Though Lukas's tone stated he otherwise.

"I think you secretly like it," Jesse answered, "Besides, no one said you had to be the group mom."

Lukas gave him a look, "And who would? Ivor?"

"How about we just pass it on to Alex for now?"

"Sounds fine by me."

They entered the house. Steve was seated at the kitchen island, reading a note, "So I have to get my wagon back?"

"Alex said you wouldn't mind," Lukas answered.

The adult shrugged, "I don't. I have to run to town to get," he glanced at the upper cabinet, "Whiskey, anyway." He leaned down and unlaced his boots, "But I'll do that in a few hours. I don't know about you Jesse, but I am tired."

"Did you guys not get much sleep?"

"We went to bed late, got up really early, and the Hallway isn't the most comfortable place to sleep," Jesse explained.

His friend snorted, "Oh I get that last bit, trust me."

Steve stood, "If either of you need me, I'll be in the master bath," he said, walking out the kitchen door, "If you can't find me...check the tub I might have fallen asleep and drowned."

The boys laughed.

Many Hours Later...

"I'm sorry if I offended you the other day," Petra said keeping her horse at a steady pace.

"About what?" Alex asked from atop her own mount, "The crib?"

"Yeah."

"Petra, it's alright," Alex smiled, "I'm not upset."

"I thought I did though..."

"You worry as much as Lukas sometimes," Alex laughed.

Petra blushed furiously, "Well, he worries way more than I do."

"Steve probably got home shortly after we left," the other said, "Lukas will see everything is fine. The plus side is you and I get to have a girl outing, and the boys can do whatever it is they do best. They'll probably run to town, Lukas told me Bach emptied the bottle."

"He wasn't even buzzed," Petra confirmed.
"Don't mess with Bach," Alex giggled, "He can out drink Steve and half the village if he wants to. Woah~" she pulled her horse to a stop, "Here we are."

Petra looked ahead of her, dropping far down below, was a massive field of sunflower, still in bloom late in the year. At the opposite end of the colorful field, was the Old Builder temple. She looked down; it was over a hundred foot drop. The cliffs sloped down on either side of her, getting smaller and smaller till it blended into the plain of flowers.

"It's beautiful," she hummed appreciatively, "But looks like we have to go the long way, I didn't bring any rope."

Alex hopped of her horse, slipped off her pack and set it onto the ground.

"What are you doing?" Petra asked.

Alex pulled a funny piece of armor from her pack, "I'm going down the cliff, what are you doing?"

Petra pointed, "There is a path down right over there."

Alex looked towards the green meadows that slowly slopped down the cliffs, "I know, I just felt like jumping today."

"Jumping?! With what?!"

"With this," Alex lifted up the strange set of gear, "Perfect time to test my new set of flying armor."

"Flying...armor..."

"Yep! I call it the Elytra," the woman explained, "It doesn't fly per say, but it does glide, perfect for jumping down from high places and not killing yourself."

Petra eyed the now obvious set of wings coming from the back of the chest piece. The armor wasn't really 'armor' on closer inspection, just a series of intricate straps to go around the chest, balancing the pressure evenly. On the back was a pair of strong silver frames, each gap between the frames was filled with a strong grey fabric of sorts, bound tightly to the poles. "Gliding..."

"Yep!"

"That's a hundred foot drop Alex."

"I know,"

"Have you even tested this?"

"Well my old model crashed me into a river," Alex chuckled, "So I had to modify and retune the blueprints. I haven't tested this version yet, but I'm positive I'll be fine."

"What model is this?"

"Number thirty-four, I think..."

"Thirty four! Alex -"

"Petra, I am a grown woman, I know what I am doing, relax. This is why it is a good thing Lukas didn't come." Alex slipped on the armor, the pair of 'wings' looked almost like a cape in their current position. "He'd have a heart attack."
"I'm having a heart attack!" Petra cried, "What am I supposed to tell Steve when you plummet to your death?!"

Alex paused, "Tell him to keep the door unlocked."

"What does that even mean-"

"Petra..." the other female said calmly, "Relax."

Then she jumped.

"Alex!"

Petra leapt off her horse and raced to the edge, coming to her knees and looking down. The carrot ginger had already plummeted down about twenty feet and quickly dropping.

"ALEX!"

She watched as Alex tilted her chest forward, the wings on the back spread apart, running parallel with her shoulder blades. Alex used her hands to push them out just a bit farther -

Air snagged under the wings and Alex's descent slowed almost immediately. She was flying - well, gliding, but in the air and not falling none the less. Petra could hear Alex laughing in delight, curving her body left and right, guiding the glider in gentle swooping curves towards the sunflower valley below. It worked...

I can't believe it, Petra gaped, the sight was amazing, She's actually gliding-

The wind picked up.

She was formally gliding.

Now Alex was pretty much spiraling out of control.

"Ahhh!" She crashed into a singular oak tree in the valley, legs kicking up only for a moment from the thick leaves before vanishing.

There was no more movement.

Petra was frozen for only half a second, "Oh my gods Alex!" she leapt on her horse and grabbed the reigns of other, kicking them into gear, "Hyah!"

She looked towards the tree as the horses raced down the incline, there was still no sign that Alex was okay.

"Alex?! ALEX?!"

It took Petra, even at a full blown gallop almost five minutes to get down the hill and cut back up toward the tree. The horses were foaming at the mouth wheezing and gasping but they still got her to the solitary oak tree.

Petra jumped off the horse before it came to a complete stop, bending her knees to absorb the impact and rushing towards the tree with a runner's sprint, "Alex?!

She was met with a wave of laughter.
High up in the branches, Alex was a tangle of snagged clothing and leaves, "Hi Petra,"
"Sweet Notch are you alright?!"

The older woman waved, "Oh yeah, only knocked me out a few seconds, I'm fine."

Petra was running around the tree trying to find a way up, "You could have died!"
"Notch had my back don't worry."

Thunder rumbled in the distance.
"I'm serious Alex!"

"So am I," Alex unclipped the elytra, "This wouldn't be the first time I have crashed into a tree. Now all we need to do is-" she went quiet.

Petra froze, "Alex?" she looked up, the other woman was looking firmly off into the distance.
"Get the horses."
"What? Why-"
"Get the horses!"

"Okay!" Petra ran back to the still wheezing steeds, "But how are we gonna get you-"

Alex ran past her, swinging her leg up and landing gracefully on Gaea.

"How did-"

"There is a caravan in trouble come on! Gaea run!"

Even though the female horse had just raced in a hard run down the hill, the mighty creature still had energy in her apparently. With a neigh and a rear of her upper body, the horse was turned and racing across the prairie.

Thoroughly confused, but understanding now that someone needed help, Petra climbed up on Titan and swiftly followed after.

The temple gleamed in the sunlight, reflecting the bright yellow flowers miles around. It was in excellent condition, nearly looked new. It was also quiet large, easily the size of the massive library back in Steve and Alex's village. There were tall spiraled pillars, and an amber roof shining brightly in the sunlight. The building looked friendly, even inviting, nothing like most of the temples of caches she was used to. But unlike the other temples Petra had visited thus far, there was sight Petra had never seen before in her life.

Creepers.

Dozens and dozens of them, more than Petra had seen together ever before. They swarmed from the darkened entrance of the temple, almost like a nest of angry hornets. They kept coming out, racing in a crazed frenzy towards their target.

Said target was not far from the temple. There were multiple sets of white cloth covered wagons, pulled along by either horses or pairs of oxen. There had to be at least fifteen people in the wagons themselves, while there was about another dozen riding singular horses around the group of covered
The people were in the fight of their lives.

The creepers attacked in masses, making the battle a near blood bath. The people struggled not to be counter attacked as the monsters swarmed around them, moving the wagons as fast as they could, screaming with each explosion cut loose from the monsters. Some of the riders were armed, but they were struggling to keep up with the fight.

Alex already had her bow out, she fired three arrows in rapid succession. They crossed the great distance, each a direct hit into some unlucky creeper's head.

"Protect the wagons!" she called to Petra.

Petra drew her sword, "Got it!"

Alex fired another series of shots, each hitting their mark with deadly accuracy. As the female got close to the wagons she leapt of Gaea, the damaged Elytra gear keeping her afloat just enough. She fired four more arrows before landing down on the top of one of the wagons, feet balanced on the support arches.

"Alex!" one of the woman cried.

Alex seemed to know the stranger, "Eliza how did this happen?!"

"We don't know! They just started swarming out of the temple! There has never been a nest here before! I've never seen them do this!" the brunette female hastily explained.

Petra was hacking back a creeper when suddenly Alex cried out, "Petra the girl!"

Petra followed the pointing finger, just a younger girl of seven or eight fell out of a wagon. The young child screamed in terror as she hit the dirt, screeching again as a creeper set its sights on her. Petra dug her heels into the stirrups, "Titan!"

As if understanding the horse surged forward, battle charging towards the deadly spawn. Petra sheathed her sword and grabbed tightly onto the saddle horn, she leaned over the side-

*Hisssss!*  

"Gotcha!" Petra scooped up the child before the monster could explode, instead getting crushed under the feet of the mighty Clydesdale. The girl sobbed heavily and clung onto Petra, "Just hang on you're going to be alright!"

"Behind you!" the girl screamed.

Petra looked back just in time to see a massive creeper lunge. Or at least, she assumed it was a creeper, in the split second she had to observe; Petra could easily tell the spawn was twice the size of a normal creeper. Its eyes glowed a unnatural purple, the haze of them seeping off almost like smoke into the air. The last thing she noticed was the gaping maw, and the foam pouring out of the sharp toothed mouth.

This creeper was insane.

That was all she processed before the Creeper lunged at her, and the girl.

"Petra!"
"Jesse was tired apparently."

"Yeah," Lukas laughed, "I was talking to him earlier but he nodded off."

"It was a long night," Steve admitted.

"I hope the girls are okay,"

"I'm sure they are having a blast."

"You think so?" Lukas asked.

"Lukas, they are in a field of sunflowers. Alex is probably making flower chains, if I know her well enough. That..." Steve mumbled off, "Or she'll test the Elytra again, which really sounds more like her."

"Elytra?"

"Well it's..."

The words blurred together in Jesse's ears and he yawned, stretching out of the large leather couch. He peeked open one eye, the clock on the wall said twelve fifteen. Fifteen more minutes, he'd sleep fifteen more minutes. Yeah... He was having a seriously hard time opening...his eyes...

"Ninazu huh?"

"That's what Aiden called them, heard of them?"

"Rings a bell, might have visited at one point..."

Jesse shot open his eyes. Did it happen again?! He looked up at the clock. Two thirty.

He sat up, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. When had he fallen asleep? He didn't remember doing that.

"You fell asleep while we talked,"

Jesse looked into the kitchen to see Lukas grinning lopsidedly from the island counter, "Do I bore you that much?" he teased.

"No! no!" Jesse yawned again, "I don't know why I fell asleep. Notch this couch is comfy maybe that's it."

"Glad you like it," Steve said, he looked refreshed and cleaner, his hair slightly disheveled from his own afternoon nap.

"As comfy as you are here, you're going to end up living here," Lukas said. It was meant to be a jest, but Jesse saw the worry in the corner of Lukas's smile.

"Don't worry man; I like my own bed waaaaaay more."

Lukas relaxed.

Steve stood, finishing his cup, "Well Lukas, I've enjoyed our little talks, but I better head to town and
get my wagon back. And whiskey...gotta get whiskey..."

"Want some company?" Lukas laughed.

"Yeah! If you like," Steve smiled, dropping his mug into the sink. "Jesse care to join?"

"Sure," Jesse managed to mumble out.

"Are we going to walk?" Lukas asked.

"Probably, Bach has one of my horses so we don't need to bring any to hitch the wagon."

"I'll get my shoes on," then the blonde left the kitchen and bounded up the stairs.

Jesse groggily got up, his back creaking in protest. He stretched feeling his joints pop, "Ow," he groaned. That couch may be the most comfortable thing ever, but his armor was not.

Steve looked over, "Well don't you look all sweaty and stiff."

"I am," Jesse confirmed, he had gotten pretty cozy during his nap. He could feel the cotton padding inside the armor sticking to his clothes. It was particularly warm out today -for late fall anyway- to top it all off. He wasn't very comfortable at the moment.

"Why don't you take your gear off, I'll lend you a clean shirt."

Jesse paused. Take his armor off?

Steve noticed, "Kiddo?"

"It's nothing," he answered quickly, "I think I'll pass on the offer though."

"I understand," Steve said, he turned on the sink, running water over his dirty dishes, "I had a hard time taking my armor off too."

Jesse looked over, surprised, "What?"

"You've probably got it in your head you need to keep yourself armed at all times, am I right?"

"I guess?"

"I remember having that issue. I was a lot like you when I was your age. I got in a lot of scrapes, got hurt a lot. I needed to be ready, protect my friends..." Steve sighed, "I was afraid to be without it for awhile."

Jesse glanced at his armor, fiddling uncomfortably with the armor straps. He was too afraid to admit it, but Steve had hit the hammer dead on the nail.

"I'm not saying you have that problem though, I can be wrong. But if you ever need to talk about anything just let me know okay?" The adult gave him a gentle smile, "I like to take care of my friends."

Jesse watched as Steve exited the kitchen, heading towards the stairs to get his things. He remembered what Lukas said:

"Man you are going to have serious PTSD issues when we get home..."
How- when- was he supposed to adapt to the normal again?

"Um Steve?"

The other stopped at the bottom of the stairs, "Yep?"

"I'll..." Jesse undid the first strap, "I'll take that shirt if the offer still stands?"

"Of course it does," Steve smiled, he stepped into the living room and placed a warm hand on Jesse's shoulder, "We'll get it figured out. And I promise I won't let anything happen while we're dressed down, okay?"

"Sounds good," Jesse managed to smile.

Lukas was needless to say a little surprised when he came back down and spotted Jesse's gear placed temporarily away on a armor rack. But he smile brightly and gave him an encouraging pat on the shoulder.

The trio left the house, all gear remaining behind.

Walking down the road Jesse could feel the cooling air on his skin and the freedom in his legs without the guards. Side by side with his friends, one old one new, and without his armor, Jesse still felt safe.

And it felt good.
Never Know

Notch's Blood and Notch's Hand, the false God rose to purge the land.

But the First would have none and fought the lost son.

Time went on its way but the battle did not sway

Till as last the First, his heart nearly shattered, reached out to the Father on a subject of dark matter.

Strike him down, till innocent blood spills no more, but Notch refused to this he swore

I cannot kill what I have made, with this truth our God could not be swayed

The First in a state of betrayal vowed, he would do then what must be done, to hunt down his brother, to kill the lost son

Through magic and fire, the battle went for days, till finally the Lost succumbed to the fiery blaze.

Notch's Blood and Notch's Hand, the false God rose to purge the land...

To kill his own bother, he had paid the ultimate price, but it left him broken, with only now a heart of ice.

He realized now, what Notch could not do, unable to face the creation he should have hew

The world went quiet, and the tales went dark, till none could remember who gave this world its gruesome mark

Notch's Blood and Notch's Hand, the God had still in the end...purged the land

Aiden fiddled with a wilting flower in his hand, leftover from a hard day of extracting plant essence. Even wilted down and faded, the Cosmic Orchid was still pretty. The internal part of the flower still mimicked the heavens it was named after, but was now more muted, the color flatter.

Ivor had been buried in the journal all day, he came out for breakfast that morning, and that was the last Aiden saw him. He didn't mind, the house was quiet, but he still had nothing to do.

So Gill and Maya had come over for a bit to help him withdraw and boil down flower extract. The cosmic fluid worked wonders in the medicinal field. It was mostly used to prevent plagues and things that could kill you. Ivor found out the petals made a great tea, which he took advantage of since he couldn't stand Aiden's coffee. And Aiden had discovered this world's particular variety was also useful in handling headaches and other bodily pains-

Such as Ivor's surprises.

Aiden jumped as Ivor threw the antique book rather loudly down onto the table. He was really starting to get sneaky with that wheel chair.

"I hate writers," the older male grumbled.

Aiden recovered from his surprise and set the flower in the pot on the table, he grinned lopsidedly,
"Aw come on now Ivor that is offensive to a lot of people, including you."

Ivor rolled towards the steaming kettle on the furnace, still grumbling.

Aiden picked up the journal and thumbed through the pages, some of Ivor's notes were stuck to the ancient texts, "Did you get it all translated yet?"

"I got some parts of the original journal done," Ivor said as he poured himself a cup of hot water and dropped some tea leaves into it, "But I thought I'd work on some of the newer sections for a bit,"

"And that is a problem?"

"Whoever wrote it was paranoid."

Aiden flipped to the biggest and newest section of the book, finding Ivor's copies tucked inside. "How so?"

"Look at the lettering."

The pages were covered from head to toe in unintelligible scrawl, none of the letters made any solid word.

"Did you translate it wrong?"

Ivor looked offended as he rolled up to the table.

"Okay... so what's wrong?"

"I noticed after awhile that the letters I was translating were not making words," the elder explained, "I figure it must be in some sort of code..."

"Uh-huh," Aiden mumbled, as he pulled loose a blank piece of paper from Ivor's stack and pulled a pencil from his pocket.

"I was never any good at codes, but I've tested it on all the ones I do know, and as far as I'm concerned this is no code I've ever seen. We are this close on possibly finding an amazing discovery and now we can't even figure out what this person has written-"

"Caesar Cipher,"

"I beg your pardon?"

Aiden set down his pencil, "It's a Caesar Cipher, look here, read the first section now,"

Ivor glanced down at the new lettering, "August 15, in the fall of - How did you figure that?!"

"Lukas and I used to be real nerds as little kids," Aiden shrugged, "We had a tree house and a secret code and all that other tacky crap." he tapped the pencil on the table, "We got really obsessed with ciphers and hidden messages for awhile. So I know a thing or two about them,"

Ivor stared.

"Stop it," Aiden frowned, "Why are you looking at me funny?"

"You sound so adorable as a child,"
He threw the pencil at Ivor, "Shut up!"

"I can only imagine what happened to that little boy," Ivor caught the pencil, laughing delighted as Aiden turned scarlet. He looked down at the journal, "I guess that solves my problem though. I'll translate, and if any of the pieces are coded, you break them." he took a sip of his tea, "I do wonder though, how did you know what cipher it was?"

"I guessed," Aiden said bluntly. "Caesar is one of the most basic ones there is,"

"Oh my word you are a nerd,"

"Ivor..." he warned.

"Calm down," Ivor handed him back his pencil, "Now, I'll start writing and you start deciphering...Mr. Code Breaker."

"Notch be damned Ivor!"

The creeper smashed into Titan with such force, it knocked the horse down onto his side. Petra yanked up her legs, and pulled the girl close to her chest, rolling through the impact as they hit the ground.

Hiiiiissssss!

The girl screamed - the sound ear splitting loud against Petra's ears- as the creeper lunged forward-

Thwip!

Two arrow's - the diamonds glittering a morbid red in the sunlight, blossomed through the forehead of the large spawn. Petra covered the little girl's eyes, slightly horrified herself as the blood ran down the face of the creature. The giant creeper toppled over, and didn't disappear in a poof of smoke and loot.

Alex was standing behind where the now corpse was once upright. Her bow was drawn, another set of arrows already notched.

"Petra are you alright?!" She gasped out between breathless pants.

"Y-yeah, we're fine," Petra cautiously got up, the child in her arms. She was still waiting for the creature to vanish. Why wasn't it despawning?

"Don't look at it, he's not going anywhere," Alex said, as if sensing her thoughts.

"Why isn't he poofing away?"

"They don't always do that here, anther unique feature to the First World I'm afraid" Alex said solemnly, she withdrew her arrows, "The other creepers retreated already, come on, let's get this young one back to her parents."

Petra looked and saw that the caravan had stopped some ways away from the battle, the men and woman going over their people and inventory for damage.

Alex ran a hand along Petra's arm, inspecting for wounds, "Are you sure you're alright?"

"I'm fine Alex, don't worry," she assured.
"It's my job to worry,"

Petra smiled, "This coming from the one who told me to relax not ten minutes ago. You know? Right before you jumped off the cliff and crashed into a tree."

"When you're my age, you have a right to worry," The older female said. "Besides, think of it as my inner mother kicking in. I'm covering for your parents till you get home."

"I don't think they have even noticed..." Petra said quietly.

Alex was clearly shocked by her statement, eyes squinting a little as she processed the new information. But before she could say anything the dark haired woman from earlier raced up.

"Oh by the grace of Notch Alex," she managed to gasp out through exhausted breath, "Your timing is impeccable."

"I try Eliza," Alex said.

Petra adjusted the child in her arms, "We have the girl?" she inquired.

"And I have her parents," Eliza gestured to a clearly stressed out couple. The pair rushed to Petra, who quickly handed them their child. They sobbed in delight, kissing and holding her tight, mumbling dozens of thanks in their native tongue.

The girl, no longer terrified, waved to Petra as she and her parents returned to the group.

"Thank you for rescuing her, Miss-"

"Petra," she extended her hand.

"I'm Eliza," the woman took it.

"Eliza here is writer from the village by the coast," Alex explained.

"Hardly a writer," Eliza answered, "More of a journalist," she smiled, "I find out what's happening and I get the word around."

"Speaking of 'what's happening' " Alex gestured to the temple, "What happened?"

"Well, we were traveling to the Festival, as we always do every year," the woman explained, "We traveled through the dark oak woods as we always do. I know it's not uncommon for creeper packs to make hibernation there. But we knew it was cold enough out now for them to be settling down in caves for the winter. Honestly we had no trouble in the forest. But shortly after we hit the sunflower fields and passed the Old Builder temple back there is when they started to swarm. We weren't very loud, and I don't understand why they would be in the temple, it's too far from the forest, they don't like to come out this far. It wasn't the biggest pack we've seen, we assumed they got separated from the main group."

The female continued. "It all happened so fast though, one of them came out of the temple - that large one you killed. We were pretty far away; we had made good time and decided not to stop here for the night like we usually do. Anyway, our archers didn't bother to shoot it, we were out of its range. Then suddenly, he looked at us and just started charging. There was this awful screech and then more of them kept coming - pouring out of the temple like ants in a nest." Eliza shrugged, "We started to fight them, but there got to be too many, so we fled. They chased us and well...you showed up shortly after that."
Petra looked back across the field, observing many of the slain creepers had not vanished alongside the large one. There were a few piles of gunpowder, but there were also a lot of corpses. The sight made her uncomfortable.

Alex was looking towards the temple eyes full of worry. "I've never heard of swarm attacking like that. Not since..." She returned her gaze to Eliza. "You said the big one started it?"

"Yes. I've never seen one get that big."

"Hmmmmm." Alex returned her attention to the wagons, "How badly damaged are you?"

"Two of our wagons have split wheels; the third one had its axel shatter."

Alex looked to Petra, "Can you keep an eye on them till I get back with supplies?"

She returned her look, a little surprised, "Are you sure?"

"We are probably going to be stuck here overnight, there is a forest nearby, I'll get the stuff we need to repair the wagons."

"If that's what you want..."

"Please?"

"Alright."

"Eliza, Petra is going to stay with you," Alex explained, "I'll be back soon. She's a good fighter she'll handle things till I get back."

"I understand."

Alex smiled, and then turned on her heel, heading off.

"I'll introduce you to the others," Eliza gestured.

Petra followed her, but she did look back once, to watch Alex.

The female was collecting her arrows littered across the battlefield, coming to a stop at the massive creeper. Her gaze was cold and steely as she stared at the corpse, reaching down and violently yanking the arrow from the skull. Then, much to Petra's confusion-

Alex reached down and checked for a pulse.

"No Steve,"

"I am literally offering to pay double Amber,"

Lukas and Jesse watched as Steve continued to bicker with the local

The baker crossed her arms, "You are getting fat."

"This is a horrible business method," Steve frowned.

"You are getting fat." the blonde repeated a teasing smile tugging at her lips.

"I cannot get fat, have you seen what I have to do all the time?"
"Yes, and you seem to be getting sluggish at it."

"You just gave the kids a pie a week ago!" Steve threw his hands in the air, "For free!"

"They needed it," Amber said, smiling impishly, "Nothing like a pie to warm the heart. They're far from home Steve I'd thought I'd cheer them up."

"But calling me fat, seriously? That's a lame reason not to sell me pie,"

"I couldn't pass up the chance to ruffle your feathers." The baker laughed. "But in all honesty the real problem is the Festival is a little less than two weeks away,"

Steve clicked his tongue, "Ah, forgot about that."

"I have to make sure I have enough, you know that, I can only make so many pies a day and I'm sorry you missed them. How about I deliver you one tomorrow?"

"Want me to pay in sugar or whatever baking supplies you need?"

"I could use some wheat?"

"Two bushels?"

"Sounds nice..."

Lukas let the conversation trail through one ear and out the other, now that Steve wasn't going toe to toe with the woman, he didn't feel the need to listen to them do business.

The village was full of hustle and bustle, even so late in the evening. People were setting of banners, and streamers everywhere. The large - maypole as Steve called it - in the center of the town had been wrapped with colorful rolls of ribbon to be used in a dance later on. Lukas wondered what kind of dance required a pole and ribbon.

In the past few weeks since first arriving here, the town's population had all but tripled. What had once been a few hundred people now easily reached thousands. The 'Festival' was a really big deal. According to Steve, every town from here to the coast would come for the party. There were lots of elders from different villages and scholars as well, here to trade history, and other valuable information. While the mayors and counsels gathered for trade route information, and other things that could benefit the towns. Then, to top it all off, there were all the traveling caravans. People with no solid place to call home gathering here to entertain, trade stories and do business. Most of the farmers fields that were now clear of crops were packed to the brim with caravan wagons.

A group of women walked by, carrying baskets of various colorful flowers, they were singing.

"Sing the song
Of the wind
When you know it's time and

Sing the song
Of the wind
When having sweet dreams

Sleep until the night ends
The wind of the night
Your song and my song
Our song goes on  
The wind of the night  
Your song and my song..."

The music was soothing, and that's what it should have done, soothed. But Lukas felt very little ease this evening. His mind kept wandering back to the house.

He didn't mind Jesse taking a nap - frankly his friend needed one- and he enjoyed talking with Steve. But then Lukas had cracked that joke, after Jesse had got up, the one about staying. And there was this look...There was this look in Jesse's eyes, even though he had laughed it off and stated he preferred to be home. His expression if only for a millisecond, gave Lukas the feeling that Jesse almost considered it. He was glad Jesse was able to relax here, seeing him without his armor was a nice sight, but at the same time Lukas was worried.

Lukas wasn't stupid, oblivious at times he would admit, but not stupid. Ever since this whole trip had started Jesse had stepped up to the leader position and boxed his feelings up like an oyster to its pearl. Lukas was very much aware that Jesse was stressed, tired, and worn down. He needed someone to talk to, and Lukas more than once had offered to be that ear, Petra and Ivor had too. But Jesse never said a word. He simply clammed up and kept it in. He put on that strong face, flashed that brilliant smile, decked out some corny speech and kept going. And Lukas knew why.

They weren't Olivia and Axel, or Reuben.

Try as he and the others might, they didn't grow up with Jesse they weren't there since the beginning.. So he didn't feel the need to burden them. Lukas recalled growing up that the trio were always as thick as thieves, hardly ever apart.

Lukas sometimes wondered if losing Reuben had anything to do with it. Jesse never really...talked about the incident...ever.

He just wished Jesse would tell him something, anything, to ease the stress. It scared him that this world made Jesse more comfortable then Lukas ever could. Not jealousy, just worry.

"The singing is pretty here," Jesse said suddenly.

"Y~eah," Lukas replied.

Jesse looked at him, "Lukas you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," He returned the look, "Are you?"

There was a momentary pause, maybe a millisecond long, and then there was that smile, "Yep! Doing good!"

Still clamming up. Still a wall...

He sighed inwardly, "Cool."

"Cool Beans!"

"Coolio..."

Jesse must have noticed Lukas wasn't really into their trademark banter at the moment, and he frowned, "Lukas, seriously what is up?"
"Nothing, just thinking."

"About what?"

"I'm sorry about what I said at the house."

Now the other male was very confused, "What did you say?" he squinted thinking, "I wasn't half asleep was I?"

"No. It's about - you know," Lukas plucked at a weed growing from a wall, "The joke about you staying here."

"Oh."

He tilted his head towards Jesse, "We are still going to get home, that is that plan still isn't it?"

"Yeah~" Jesse raised a questioning eyebrow, "Why wouldn't it be?"

He shrugged, "Well you seem, I dunno, comfortable? ...Very, comfortable...here?"

Jesse frowned, "So I feel a little more relaxed here, so what? It's just nice not to have to worry about dying for a change. And we have help to top us off. That's a bonus!" He crossed his arms, "Lukas, I still plan on getting us home, all of us."

"Just checking," Lukas sighed, he gave a weak smile, "You know if you ever need to talk-"

"Lukas, I'm fine."

That was the end of the conversation; Steve came back supplies and whiskey in hand and they headed towards his home. Jesse put on his usual face acting as if nothing changed. Steve continued to awe and inspire with all the cool stories he had, seemingly oblivious to the tension.

But Lukas slipped a little deeper into his worry, staring at the stress hiding in the corner of Jesse's smile, which seemed to vanish now that Steve was there.

"Hey,"

Petra looked up from the hypotonic flames of the central fire, "Oh hey,"

Alex dropped down next to her. "Everyone alright?"

"Yeah, the last of them just went to sleep, I was staying up to keep watch."

"That was sweet of you,"

Petra smiled, "Get everything you need?"

"Yep, we'll have them up and running in the morning, and if you'd like, we can still hit the temple. It's clear of creepers now."

"Sounds good."

The fire crackled, matching with a symphony of crickets it filled in the silence of the night.

"Petra?"
"Hmmm?"

Alex was staring firmly at the fire, "Can I ask you a personal question?" she inquired after a moment.

Petra hesitated, but nodded, "Yeah, sure. What's up?"

"What did you mean earlier today?"

"I don't understand."

The older ginger turned her gaze to Petra, "What did you mean when you said, you don't think your parents even noticed you were gone?"

Petra stiffened.

Alex noticed, "I see," she returned to her fire, "You don't have to tell me, it just worried me that's all-
"

"They were gone a lot," Petra said quietly.

Alex raised an eyebrow, the fire reflecting of the sea blue-green eyes.

"They traveled a lot," she kept going, "Dad did a lot of digging and Mom did a lot of business. So they were never around ya know?" she shrugged, "After awhile I just stopped trying to get their attention. I went my own way. I started digging, doing deals. I haven't solidly been home in over four years."

The other was silent.

"I check in every now and then, just to prove I was alive." Petra sighed, "They never had issues with me going on my own. I mean - I know they love me- but would it kill them to show it now and then?" The words were slipping faster now, "One time I didn't come home for six months, six frickin months. They never wrote, or tried to get a hold of me. Then, just one day, oh, they started caring. They wanted quality time because they realized that family is important. Yeah? Well I didn't care! So I stayed busy, I did a lot of business, I was never home....I didn't even check in before I went through the Old Builder Portal."

"Oh sweetie..."

"Now look, their daughter is gone, Notch only knows where! But because I turned out exactly like them, because I hardly ever - if never - check in, they don't know where I am! I wonder how long I'll be out here before one of them thinks 'Hey anyone heard from Petra?' I think sometimes, what if I die out there. Will they look for me? Will they wonder?! Or did I push them away for good?!"

"Petra-" she threw her stick in the fire, "Sometime I wished I tried a little harder. Just to be there. But I had to be an ass, and now...they might never know."

Silence.

Alex leaned close; pushing away a tear that Petra hadn't realized escaped, "Petra, you can't plan these things..."

She shook her head, "I can never take it back."
"You keep wishing you had, you'll miss what you can do," Alex said sadly, "If I could tell you the things I wish I could take back..." she hugged Petra, "We're gonna get you home. And you're gonna get the chance I never got, okay?"

Petra leaned into the hug, shaking, she didn't realize...

The fire crackled into the night.

"Okay..."
The Dead World

They took an oath that night, all who remained. There were so few of them left now, despite the First trying his hardest to save as many as he could. They still lost so many.

But they took their oath, despite their grief, they swore.

Never again would we speak of him, never again write his name.

The Lost One was to be erased from all record.

Names are power. His name, gives him power.

I wonder why though. I s he not dead? It took me many years, but I finally found it. I found his name.

They swore an oath, but I did not.

I know him, I know his name.

His name is-

(The writing becomes illegible and the last section has been torn clean off.)

"So there was nothing there," Petra said with a huff. "Which was irritating since we were almost killed."

Steve blew the dust off his dagger, "I hate it when that happens."

"Yeah, well," Petra adjusted herself on the porch swing, "Got to meet some cool people."

"There is a good silver lining."

"There was also this creeper that- what are you doing," Petra stopped.

"Sharpening my dagger and listening to you," Steve answered.

Petra inspected the gleaming weapon, "I've never seen a diamond dagger before."

The adult male paused from his sharpening, and extended it out, giving Petra a better look at the lethal tool. It was almost too long to be a dagger and the blade was jagged, curving in, almost circular just a bit before extending back out. The handle was silver steel, while the majority of the blade was diamond, inlaid with something white.

"What's the white part?" Petra asked.

"Dragon bone."

"Where in the world did you get dragon bone?!"

Steve got up from the deck chair, inspecting the edge of the blade, "I picked it up somewhere..." he looked at her, "Wanna see something cool?"

"Yeah?"
Steve hopped off the porch, heading around the back to the archery range, Petra following in tow.

Steve took a stance at the archer's mark, "Watch this." He pulled the blade back, up over his shoulder, eyeing the target way down the path. Then he wrenched his arm forward, releasing the weapon.

The dagger flew hard and fast, spinning through the air till it looked nothing more than a spinning blue disk. It embedded itself in the center of the target stopping at the hilt.

There wasn't even a noise.

"Woah,"

Steve laughed, "Wasn't that good at first, I assure you." he fetched his dagger and returned to the mound, he extended it out to Petra, "Here, you try."

"Really?"

"Yeah really. Lukas got to play with Alex's bow, why can't you play with daggers- I mean an oversized kitchen knife."

Petra raised an eyebrow, "You're giving a dangerous weapon to an inexperienced youth?" she teased.

Steve shrugged, "I believe in learning on the go," he extended it out once more, "Wanna try?"

Petra paused, hardly a second and then she took the dagger. "Sure," she grinned impishly, "There isn't anyone beyond the wall back there I hope? I mean, is this where you get payback on Alex for the Lukas arrow incident?"

"Perish the thought Petra, I would never!" He laughed, eyes glittering with mischief.

She chuckled, stepping on the mound, "Okay, how does this work?"

Steve guided her arm up and back over her shoulder, "Keep it parallel with your other arm, like you are a set of rail tracks. Make sure when you release you let go just before your hand is level with your shoulder, or the knife will either go up or straight into the dirt." He pointed towards the target, "Take a deep breath, exhale on the release, make sure you look far ahead of you and not at your hand, there you go-"

Petra threw the dagger.

It didn't spin quite as gracefully, landing in the dirt a few feet away from the target.

She frowned.

"Well your arm isn't weak," Steve hummed, his jogged over and brought back the knife, "Try it with more oomph this time."

Petra chucked it.

The dagger flew past the target embedding the point in the stone wall.

"Oh crap! I'm sorry!"

Steve was laughing, "Better it than me! I threw the damn thing into my foot once." he went to
retrieve the dagger, "We'll keep practicing."

Petra smiled and tried not to imagine the male with 'oversized kitchen knife' in his foot, "Did Alex help you with that?" she called.

"No she did not, and she doesn't need to know!" he called back. "I'm not supposed to be teaching children how to play with knives!"

Petra burst into a fit of laughter.

Jesse crawled out of the portal, dripping wet, and very tired. He looked down past his waist.

Oh good, legs.

Alex plopped out seconds later, her hair also wet, plastered to the sides of her face, "Well that was fun," she quipped.

"I beg to differ," Jesse tried to stand, but his legs were wobbly and unstable, "It's hard to swim with armor, much less without legs."

"I thought you made a cute little merman," Alex got up and put a sign in front of the portal labeling the world. She followed with a smaller sign that said 'Warning, you will lose your legs' "You had a pretty green tail and everything. It matched your suspenders," she laughed.

Jesse hummed, pulling himself uneasily up on a nearby broken pillar, "You were a pretty mer- what did you call it?"

"Mermaid," she answered, "Half human half fish."

"Well, you made a very beautiful mermaid," He finished.

Alex grinned sitting down next to him, "Thanks, I like how our tails were matching."

Jesse looked to the door, "I've never had a portal physically change me before. I'm a little weirded out by it."

"I've had it happen before," Alex said, "I should have recognized the door." she wrung some water out of her hair, "I think the Old Builder's - and I mean the old old ones - designed the portal's like that on purpose to keep people alive."

"Yea~h" Jesse sighed.

"You saw that world, it was entirely composed of water, and the exit gate was at the bottom of the ocean. We wouldn't have made it down there unless we had the ability to breath underwater." she plucked a sea flower from her hair.

"I guess we better be grateful the Old Builders like to mess with human anatomy,"

She chuckled, "Yeah, I guess we should." her stomach growled then and she clutched it with a groan. "Swimming sure makes me hungry though, and I lost all our food in that shark attack."

Jesse bent over his own stomach complaining and pulled water out of his hair, "Guess we should head back then?"

"Unless we find food," Alex paused as the Hallway lit up in a portal flash, "Or unless dinner walks
He heard her notch her bow and Jesse glanced through the tresses of his wet hair, his eyes widening in alarm. "Alex wait!" he cried, but it was too late, she had already released the arrow.

However, by some miraculous unexpected miracle, or by intense skill, Alex slashed her bow outward, the point just barely hitting the arrow feather. But it was enough to send the weapon spiraling out of control.

The arrow embedded itself in the ground, not inches from its target.

The pig squealed in surprise and fled down the hall, leaping through another portal.

There was silence.

Jesse stared wide eyed at the arrow on the floor, too afraid to look up because he knew Alex was looking at him wondering...

Why had he stopped her?

"Jesse-"

He hastily got up, face red, "I'm s-sorry, I- I don't know what-" he quickly advanced down the hall, "We'll get it back."

Alex followed hastily after, "Jesse wait-"

"It's nothing Alex, I'm fine," he cut in quickly, "We'll catch him okay? He- it just went through the door right there- it can't be far."

*It's not Reuben, it's just a pig, it's just a pig.*

"Jesse!" her voice turned distressed.

He didn't noticed, "I'll get it back Alex," he stepped into the portal, noting there wasn't a sign for it.

"Jesse wait!" she screamed out, startling him-

Too late.

Jesse stepped through and immediately the breath was stolen from his lungs. He couldn't breathe! There was no light either, no sound, he couldn't see, couldn't hear! It was like stepping into a vacuum of nothing. Where was everything?! Where was he? He couldn't even see the pig!

There was *nothing*.

Till there was something.

He felt a sharp pull in his left arm, a hot heat in his hand. Jesse was moving backwards, but it felt so slow, like the void before him was holding on tight-

Then he was stumbling back out of the portal, air rushing into his lungs and he gasped. There was a hand on his opposite shoulder and he was forced to turn around, falling into the open arms of Alex.

Alex herself was pale as a sheet of paper, eyes wide with fear. "Jesse! Oh thank Notch!" she pulled him into her embrace, shaking; "I thought I'd lost you!"
"I'm- I'm sorry," he stammered still in shock, "I just went after the pig and I-

"Forget the pig," she soothed, "He's gone."

"I-

"Shhhh, by the heavens, I was afraid I'd never get you back!"

Jesse glanced towards the door. It looked like a normal portal, made from wood oak not yet polished, the inner magic black. But upon closer inspection, Jesse could see the wood looked almost rotted in the interior, black lines running through the grain. And the magic itself...there was no glow, no reflection, no swirling. It was just like the void. Why was the other side so dark though?

"It's a dead door," Alex said softly, as if reading his thoughts.

"What do you mean?"

She pulled away, just far enough to inspect him for any damage. Her eyes were sad, the color not yet returned to her face, "I mean the world on the other side has died."

"Died?"

"Yes, its time ran out."

Jesse was confused, "I don't understand."

"No world last forever Jesse," Alex answered.

He felt his heart skip a beat. "You mean the darkness, that silence was..."

"Nothing, there is only nothing. The world died, but the portal remained." Alex got up from the floor, and walked towards the door. She pulled stone from her inventory, placing it inside the rotting beams. "Some of Notch's creations simply run out of time."

"But what about the people?"

"There are none," Alex pulled the last sea flower from her hair and placed it down in front of the door, "They're gone. The pig that ran ahead of you is gone, and if I hadn't caught hold of your hand before you went through..." She cringed, "You would have been gone too."

Jesse shakily sat down, and stared from his spot on the floor, "How did you know it was a dead door?"

The woman stood there for a moment, hands resting upon the stone barrier."I saw a world die once."

His eyes widened.

Alex sat down next to him, "This was before I married Steve, when I was traveling on my own. The sun was dying, and the stars were going out. Everytime I went there, it was a little colder, a little darker. I went every day, trying to get everyone to leave. Some of them wouldn't. They thought things would get better soon...as long as they waited it out."

"Soon all the stars died, then the moon vanished. Night was so dark, and so cold, ice slowly began to cover the world. Then the sun finally died, and I watched as everything fell into nothing. And...and there were still people...but they..."
Alex wiped stray tears from her eyes, "There was nothing left alive after the sun died. So I left the world, and the old magic that powered the door faded away, and the inner section turned black as the dead world it held."

Jesse looked at the door, now covered with its stone grave marker. "I saw other doors blocked off like this. Ivor said it best to leave them alone. Now I know why..." he looked at Alex, "Did you cover all those doors?"

"Most of them," she admitted. "I didn't want anyone to go through, like I said before, you can't come back." she sighed, "I'll never forget seeing the life drain from everything. I can't handle seeing death, and I surely didn't want that to be the last thing you ever saw. Someone as young and as bright as you, shouldn't experience tragedy. But," Alex looked at him, "I have a feeling you already have."

Jesse looked away, heart throbbing, "I didn't mean to stop you, I just- I-" he couldn't say another word.

How could he explain Reuben to her?

"I'm just glad you're safe. I think I would have died if I lost you," Alex set a hand on his cheek, "There is no need to explain what you did back there. You don't have to tell me Jesse. Death doesn't have to take a person for you to experience it. I can tell you don't want to talk about it just yet." She stood clearing her eyes, and pulling him up, "Let's get home. I think we're done here for today."

"Kay..."

"How does soup sound?" she asked as she pulled away from the door, giving it one last sad glance.

He stepped into line next to her. Walking silently down the hall he thought of the pig, and how it no longer existed. He wondered, if the Witherstorm had killed everyone along side Reuben and successfully devoured the world; would their door have died?

"His name was Reuben." Jesse said softly.

Alex paused, eyes going wide a little, "Reuben?" she whispered, her eyes softened, "...Rueben."

"He.....he was....." Jesse trailed off, biting his lip.

Alex looked sadly to him, "I'm sorry Jesse." She wrapped an arm around his shoulder, and he leaned into it. Then the pair continued on, leaving behind the silent grave.


Petra pulled the knife out of the bulls-eye. "What can I say? I like to learn quickly," she smirked.

"Well I can see that," Steve remarked as she returned to the archer's mound. "I just might have to get back to practicing."

Petra grinned.

"Hey guys!"

They looked to the porch just as Lukas exited the house.

Petra waved, "Hey man! How was the nap?"
"Good, I needed it," Lukas answered. He leaned against the railing, "Steve can I ask for some help?"

"Sure with what?"

"Well Alex brought home a pretty big batch of books from the first cache; we're still going through them. Anyway, I pulled some out; because I thought I'd try and see if I can read any of them but some of them look kinda strange and I was hoping you could tell me if this is a First World thing or not."

Steve tilted his head, "Strange? Huh, alright be right in."

Lukas nodded, and returned back into the house.

"Practice is over for now then," Petra said, handing the diamond knife to Steve.

He looked at it, "Keep it."

"What? Seriously!"

"Sure! If Alex complains I'll get on her for giving Lukas a bow. Besides, you're better with it than I am."

Petra felt her eyes light up, "Thanks!"

Steve grinned, heading towards the house with Petra in tow. They entered the kitchen to see Lukas sitting at the table, a big pile of books stacked up on the floor. The large leather bound novel on the table however, was glowing.

"What in the world?" Petra said.

"Can you tell me if it's enchanted or not? Because I've never seen an enchantment like this.' Lukas asked.

Steve hissed, "No~." he gingerly opened the cover, "It's full of magic, but it's not enchanted."

"How is it full of magic then?"

"There was some rip in the magical fabrics of the world. Is this the set of books Alex and you guys brought back from the swamp."

"Yeah, but I didn't see any glowing ones before."

"Was this one wrapped in a canvas?"

Lukas thought about it, "Yeah, now that I look back on it, this one was."

"Okay, so that was the books seal, which means someone already knew it had been exposed to magic and covered it up."

"Exposed?" Petra asked.

Steve explained. "It rarely happens, but sometimes old magic from deep within the world leaks into inanimate objects, such as books. They um...well they accidentally absorb it up."

"What does it do then?"
"Well sometimes memories of the world flow into the books, showing the whoever something that happened long ago. Or sometimes they just catch on fire. It really could be anything to put it bluntly." Steve said, "You can have a book on fishes, but the magic will fill it with memories of a sandstorm in the desert three hundred years ago, or you open your cook book then your house gets flooded with a lake worth of water. It's pretty random."

"That kinda sounds like some of them may be a cool feature," Petra said.

"Well, getting hit with ancient magic straight to your brain can be kinda painful, lethal even."

"Oh," Petra cringed, "Not cool then."

Steve turned a page, "You have to handle it delicately. They say even the drawings are filled with memories."

Lukas leaned back away from the book, "Well it looks like it's in your language anyway. I think it best to leave this one to you an Alex."

"I'm not sure even I want to handle it, these things can be dangerous. I shouldn't have even opened the cover..."

Petra reached over, "Maybe we should close it then-"

The wind gusted up so suddenly the kitchen door swung open. The wind tore through books, shooting open covers and rapidly turning pages.

Including the magic soaked book.

Petra saw a fancy painting of a dark oak tree; none of the lines were straight all curved and tangled together in an intricate array of knots that somehow still composed the tree. That was all she could make out before the page hit the back of her hand.

There was a sharp searing pain and Petra fell to the floor, everything going white even before she hit the hardwood. She heard only one sound, and it was the sound of a woman wailing.
I recall my great grandfather telling me the story often; though he never used names, at least never the names of the Lost One.

He says everyone called it the Battle of the Immortals. But he was there, he watched. He witnessed the First rise up as the Dark One attacked. To wield nature itself to do your bidding, to will fire and water at your command...

It was not Battle of Immortals

It was a battle of Gods.

He would tell of his village, the one high on the mountains not far from where we resided today.

He says the reason the Other attacked us first was because our home was special to the Wanderer. Our village was the very first one he established when we mortals were created.

He says it was a blood bath before the Wanderer got there, none of his people were capable of fighting a demigod.

His father was killed and so was his little sister. He had to drag his mother out of the home.

He had only been fourteen years of age.

As his age rises and his health depletes the story becomes more forgotten. He cannot quite recall how his father died, or who made it out. But he still remembers vividly the look on the First's face when he arrived.

My great grandfather is the only one left alive now from the incident, and he can no longer even remember the names of his children.

But he has not forgotten that look...

The First had been betrayed. He was wounded straight down to his soul. In a matter of seconds and in rivers of blood his heart became dark.

He wanted revenge.

The woman wailed.

There were people screaming

There was a deafening crack.

Petra's eyes shot open right as a large oak tree crashed through the ceiling. Crying out in alarm she rolled away, scrambling up and racing for the wall.

She hit the stone gasping for air. This wasn't Steve and Alex's! Where was she?!

There was an ear splitting roar and the ground shook.

"Lukas! Steve!" she cried. "Where are you?!"
That woman screamed in response, a broken horrified cry of heart wrenching agony.

Petra turned away from the wall, facing the unknown house she was in and its sole resident.

A dark hair woman in her later forties knelt before the fallen tree that had destroyed her home. Her thick village dress in tattered rags at the hem. The source of her grief was a man and a small child, victims of the relentless branches.

Petra's heart stopped.

The tree.

The house in the abandoned village.

The bones.

"The books sometimes contain memories of things that happened long ago in this world."

She was in the village.

"No! No! No! Noooo!" the woman screamed.

The ground shook again, and parts of the roof caved in, but still the stranger remained kneeled in her grief.

Petra shoved herself off the wall, "Hey!" she grabbed onto the woman's shoulders, "We have to go! You can't stay here!"

"Amar! Shia! Notch! Please dear Maker do not take them from me!"

"Hey!" she tried to shake the woman all while trying not to look at the gruesome scene within the branches. "I'm sorry, but you can't stay- Can you hear me?!"

There was a vociferous roar, followed by an overwhelming wave of screams.

"Mama!" a young boy perhaps a bit younger than Petra, raced into the room out of breath; bleeding profusely all over his arms, "Mama!"

"No~"

"Mama! He is coming we must flee!"

"No!"

The son cried out, a mixture of grief and rage and yanked her roughly up, "They are gone mama!"

Petra's ears were buzzing, she could hear the old tongue coming from their lips, but she could hear her language as well. This was like a vision, like a dream, and it conveniently translated for her.

The picture in the book.

It revealed a memory!

Now sure of how she got here, she got up, following the pair outside hoping to find an exit from the magical flashback. Petra was immediately greeted with an overwhelming wave of fire and smoke. There was no temple, there was no Portal door, but she recognized the village high upon the cliffs.
She spotted a large glittering stone mansion, the one Lukas told her hand gemstones in it. The gemstones sparkled in the fiery blaze—

Till the roof was smashed clean off.

"You are all gnats!" A mighty voice shook the earth, "You are dust under my finger nails!"

Someone raced by Petra bumping into her, "Notch preserve us!" he cried, fleeing with others into the woods - the forest much smaller than it had been before.

"Your God is no longer here! He cares not for you and your filth! I am your God now!" Fire came raining down from the heavens, striking the edge of the forest up like a set of matches. Agonized cries poured out of the burning woods,

"I will purge this world!" The voice boomed.

Petra started running, unable to resist her overwhelming urge to flee. She ran with others away from the woods, towards a cobblestone road away from town.

Something hit the ground behind her, a wave of air sending her and almost everyone else to the dirt. Petra looked sharply behind her, gasping in shock and fear.

One of the Immortals. The being behind her had to be.

They're real.

She had honestly doubted Steve and Alex's stories, brushing them off most of the time. But right here, right now, she believed very much.

She couldn't see a face, beyond all that armor, but evil radiated off him like smoke. Some villagers got up, arming themselves with hoes and axes. They charged at the all powerful being, seeking vengeance for their home.

The Immortal flicked away the first one with a mere swipe of his hand. The next he summoned water from the earth, using it like a whip to slice the next man's throat. He caught a woman by her face, and smashed her head to the ground, "You are nothing to me." He started walking.

Horrified Petra scrambled up.

FLEE! FLEE!

"You are nothing to a God."

Petra felt her arm get wrenched back, and she was whipped around. Now face to face with the Immortal.

"Well, well, well. What have we here?" His lips didn't move.

What?

Petra looked into the brown eyes between the helmet visor and couldn't work up a sound.

He raised his arm, and Petra heard a scream as he forced his fist through her midsection.

Nothing.
Petra looked down, just as she saw a woman fall out of her body, entire middle cleaved through. She hit the ground, her blood pouring everywhere, while Petra remained standing, now transparent and still unharmed.

The Immortal spat into the ground, and moved on. Leaving his own phantom behind.

"Well, well, well." the ghost repeated.

Petra took a step back.

She couldn't recognize the male; there was hardly anything to discern left. Most of his skin was cracked and burned, like a charred corpse from a fire. His eyes were milky white, the iris's gone as if he had been recently blinded.

He was looking right at Petra.

"I don't get many visitors here."

"W-what?"

"No one has seen what happened here in a long time." He gestured around, "Do you like my handiwork?"

Petra took a step back, "Who the hell are you?"

The man laughed, "I am an Immortal you foolish child. Can't you see that?" he grinned. "Oh well, you'll see soon enough."

"-What d-do you mean-"

He lunged at her.

Petra screamed and sat up, skull connecting with Steve, "OW!"

Steve seemed unfazed by the sudden and unexpected head butt. "Petra are you alright?" He stressed.

Dazed and confused and seriously sore in the head, she took in her surroundings, "Where-" she recognized Steve and Alex's kitchen. She's out of the dream.

Lukas was next to her, hand on her shoulder, "Are you alright?"

"What happened?"

"Your hand touched a page, then you collapsed." he said worried, "We've been trying to wake you up for over twenty minutes! I was afraid that you, that you..."

She looked to the table, the book was no longer glowing. "I-I"m okay, Ow, I think." she rubbed her head, "Who did I hit?"

"Me," Steve said, he placed a hand on her free shoulder, "Petra...what did you see?"

"I saw-" she froze.

The village.

The Immortal.
Lukas leaned closer, "Petra?"

"Lukas! I saw it!" she grabbed his hand, "I saw what happened."

"Happened to what?!" he asked alarmed.

"The old village where the portal temple is! I saw what happened, I saw people die! Lukas, there was an Immortal!"

"What?!"

"It had to be, who else could have had that kind of power?!" she looked to Steve, "Did the First, did he destroy that village? Did he kill those people. Jesse said Alex told him there had been a battle. Did the First do that?!"

Steve looked a bit pale, "No."

"Was it the second one then? The Healer?"

"No..."

"I know it was an Immortal Steve! What happened?"

Steve leaned back on his knees, sighing heavily, "It's well..." he ran fingers through his hair, "You guys have heard about the First, and the Healer. But have you ever heard about the Dark One?"

Lukas nodded, "Back home yeah, they said he was the opposite of Notch. Notch created, while the other destroyed." he hesitated, "But isn't that just a fairy tale for children to behave."

"Not exactly," Steve said.

"Then what," Petra asked.

"No one in town talks about it. It's kind a hush hush matter, sworn oath an all that..."

"Steve?"

The other male stood, rubbing his amulet around his neck, circling his thumb counter clockwise on the shimmering blue stone. "I guess I'm going to have to explain a few things to you kids before we go messing with any more First World stuff, things you might need to know now. But we're going to have to wait till Jesse gets back."

"Explain what?" Lukas asked as he pulled Petra up.

"The Dark One isn't a boogie man. He was real and he isn't who you think he is."

"Oh!" Alex stumbled shortly after exiting the Hallway of Worlds, going to her knees.

"Alex!"

Jesse dropped down next to her, "Alex are you alright?"

The woman had gone pasty white, sweat dripping down her neck, she clutched her amulet, the blue stone almost seemed to pulse light through the gaps in her fingers.

Far off in the distance the volcano let out a low rumbled, and the sky rattled with thunder.
"Alex?!

"I'm fine, just fine," she assured, more to herself then Jesse.

Jesse looked to the volcano, "Did the mountain cause an earthquake, did you stumble?" He fretted, "Are you sure you're okay?"

"Mt. Incendia didn't trip me," She stood, gripping his hand tightly; "I'm fine dear don't worry."

"Let's just sit down for a minute." He pressed.

"If that makes you feel better. " she complied, joining him on a fallen pillar. She smiled, "You're such a worry wart, and so sweet," she placed a hand on his cheek, "Sometimes I just wish I could keep you."

Jesse smiled softly.

"I'm just a little worn out, probably from my heart attack when you stepped into the dead world. Don't worry."

"If you insist..." he said slowly, he glanced back at the smoking mountain, "Did you call it Mt. Incendia?"

"Yes, it means Fire in the old tongue."

"It's not ready to blow is it?"

She chuckled, a weak sound since she seemed drained and out of breath, "Oh no. The people of long ago harnessed the energy of the mountain when they built their city there."

"A city?"

"Yes, an entire city and castle rest in that volcano. Underneath the base of the volcanic city are the diamond mines, rich and full."

"Do people still live there?"

"No, and they don't go into the mines either. It's completely abandoned," she explained. "No one has been there for a long time."

"Why doesn't your village mine the diamonds there?"

"Too dangerous, it's pretty unstable in the city above, and you know how spawns like mines. Not to mention, the city was founded by the Immortals, and you know how we are with his stuff."

"Oh..."

There was a moment of silence, just Alex taking her deep breaths and Incendia rumbling in background.

"I've never seen your amulet glow before."

Alex opened her palm, the blue stone still gently pulsing in her hand, "Yes, Steve is calling me."

"Steve is calling?!"
Yes. You've probably noticed he has a matching piece."

"Yeah. But how is he - you know? "

"Well we can send magical signals to each other. The amulets can also help us find the other if one of us is in danger. They are enchanted. It was a wedding gift from him."

"Wow that is, wait - Danger?!!" Jesse went into alarm, "Is there danger right now?!"

"No, no," she thumbed the amulet, "It's a gentle light, he's telling me to come home. He probably needs to talk."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive." She stood, "Good thing we're heading back now." she crossed the clearing to where their horses were still faithfully waiting.

"Those amulets seem pretty handy. Wish I had one," Jesse smiled slightly.

"They are," Alex climbed up onto Gaea, "We actually have three of them."

"Really," Jesse hopped onto Titan, "Why do you have third, is it a spare?"

Alex's eyes went sad, like she regretted bringing it up. She gripped her amulet - the pulsing now almost gone - and turned her horse away, "It was a gift I never got to give." she said quietly.

"I have never seen you so engrossed in something before."

Aiden set down his pencil and took a drink of his coffee. "Sorry, Ivor just really wants these things translated." he laughed, pulling off his reading glasses, "Kinda obsessed with it actually."

Isa smiled into her teacup, "Well his decoder isn't lacking enthusiasm."

Aiden felt his cheeks heat up a little, "I'm sorry, I know I should stop. I haven't had much to do lately with Bites in the jungle and Cosmic Orchids locked in the greenhouse for winter..."he shrugged, "It entertains me. I know I should come out and help with the wall some more."

"The wall is as fortified as it is going to get for this year," Isa said, "I'm pretty sure that no one is going to be able to get through, over, or under it."

"What about the food stores?"

"Pretty good." Isa sighed, "I just wish we could find a health potion for Ivor, but without access to the Nether and therefore resources to a brewing stand, you're stuck with him."

"He's not too bad," Aiden said, "A lot quieter since he got the book. Lukas says the First World is out of them too, but if they get their hands on any, they'll bring them here."

"I'm glad it has been of some pleasure to him."

Aiden hummed, taking another drink, "Did I tell you Fifty Shades burned?"

Isa knew immediately what he meant, "Oh joy. Revolting piece of work if you ask me." she raised an eyebrow, "Did you read it?"
"I didn't see the label! I thought it was the journal. I opened it up in the middle and well..." He picked up his pencil and went back to decoding, face red, "It burned."

Isa laughed. She scooted her chair over, "What section are you decoding now?"

"Ivor spent most of the past week translating the newest part of the book. That one seems to be the youngest piece; he estimates it was written between ten to twenty years ago.

"And?"

"Well, from what I read, the writer is the descendant of all the previous entries. I think she gathered multiple writings and gathered them together in one big book."

"She?"

"Yeah, it was a woman. She talks about her husband at one point, and longing to start a family."

"Sounds like a normal journal."

"It was,"

Isa leaned in, "What do you mean?"

Aiden flipped to the beginning of his notes, "These pages right here didn't have to be decoded, even though there are a few entries missing and a few dates that are unreadable. She seemed to have pretty normal childhood and blissful youth."

Isa read some of the notes, "On today, the happiest of days, I finally will be married to my beloved. Many years I have longed for him, many years I have looked forward to this day. Father says the First himself will be there...Interesting."

"Then something happened a few years later it never says; but she just snapped. I don't know what happened." Aiden turned a few pages.

Leave! Leave, we must flee! Death hides in the woods, blood leaks from the soil! He comes, he comes! This world is not safe, this world is a grave waiting to be filled!

The woman cringed, "Oh dear."

"That's her last normal entry. If you could call 'blood leaks from the soil' normal," Aiden explained. "Everything past that point is coded. Like she is afraid of someone reading it. "He flipped back to his current page, "I haven't read too much actually - I've been too busy breaking her codes. But I think she moved from whatever world she lived in."

"Moved? As in went into the Hallway?"

"Yeah, I think so." Aiden sighed, "I wonder what happened to make her like this?"

"Who knows?" Isa looked sadly at the journal, "Poor girl."

Ivor rolled into the room at the moment. He had that look his eyes. His eyes were narrowed and his inner gears turning. Aiden knew that look by now.

Something bothered the old man.

"Hello Ivor," Isa said, she herself wasn't familiar with his look, "How is the reading coming?"
Ivor quietly set the book on the table, and then set his own translated edition next to it. "There are no names." he stated simply.

"What?"

"I started noticing that words were cut off at certain points. Like someone wrote a name in, and then it was blocked out." he thumbed the pages, "I went all the way back to the beginning, and the pattern is constant. Every time a certain name is about to be mentioned, the pages either tears over it, or there is so much ink covering the name I can discern it."

"But what's wrong with a name?" Isa asked.

Isa's statement stuck Aiden funny, it reminded him of: "Hold on a second. There is something on names just-" he flipped through his own workings, then opened the original journal to the corresponding page, "Here, I found this when I was decoding. It came out in the old tongue instead of English, like the code was reversed."

In big bold letters on the original journal were these words:

Ille quaestus imperium ex eius nomine!

Over and over, the message repeated, till it covered the entire page. Aiden pulled out his own notes, "I remembered some of the old tongue you showed me how to translate, and I got this." he placed his paper down:

He gains power from his name!

Aiden leaned back in their chair, "I have no idea what it means though."

"I think I do," Ivor said. He picked up his notes. "Isa you said the opening English entry mentions the Dark One."

"Yes?"

"Well I think that's who they're trying to cover up."

"The Dark One? Hold up," Aiden leaned back in, "I thought this journal contained entries on the Lost Immortal, not the bedtime story from back home."

"That's the thing," Ivor explained, "The Dark One started popping up all over history. Possibly sometime after the Lost Immortal vanished from record. But he was never described as an Immortal; he was simply a being that did the opposite of Notch's work. Now, in this entry here that you gave me to translate a few days ago it says this."

Twas not the Brother but the Son.

"Now I found this very interesting, because the Dark One is often described as Notch's Brother, while the Immortals are considered the children of the deity. So this is what I have concluded, that somewhere along the time line, the Lost Immortal became the Dark One."

Isa's eyebrows went up, "Twas not the brother but the son."

Ivor nodded, "Exactly. What happened, these people, whoever they were. Erased his name from history to the point where historians couldn't even figure out who the Lost Immortal was. There is a poem in here talking about a false god, which some consider to be the Dark one. Now back home,
there is only a few pieces, talking about how he came to purge the land and the First rose up to meet him. Everyone assumed it meant the First took down Notch's brother. But this journal has the complete poem, and at one point it says son of Notch, and brother of the First, so they must have gotten mixed up somehow.

"But what could have happened to force an entire society to erase someone's name?" Aiden asked.

"I don't know," Ivor said, "But whatever happened, it was so bad, that they feared to even speak it. To the point where if anyone slipped up in future years they removed or erased the evidence."

"But this confirms that the Dark One isn't real, but the Lost One is."

"I'm afraid it confirms them both."

"What do you mean Ivor?"

Ivor looked solemnly at the book, "The tales of the Dark One and his deeds did not appear till much later after the Lost One's defeat, and we now they are probably one and the same person."

"Which means?"

"It means, that the Lost One might not be as dead as everyone in this journal believes."
Once I called you brother, once I thought the chance to make you laugh was all I ever wanted.

And even now I wish there another, serving as your foe on their behalf is the last thing that I wanted...

This was my home...

All this pain and devastation, how you torture me inside. All the innocents who suffer from your stubbornness and pride.

You who I called brother, why must you call down another blow?

The one who I called brother, how could you have come to hate me so? Is this what you wanted?

Then let my heart be hardened, and never mind the price that I must pay, death is now the only way.

He who I called brother...if only this hadn't been so...

-supposedly a letter written by the First himself shortly before the Purging of Mt. Incendia. Claims have been disputed however and the manuscript is now considered false.

"Well that was unnerving."

"Mmmm,"

Lukas pulled off his shirt, pulling on a lighter sleep shirt that Alex had gotten for him. "You know Jesse, the more I hear them talk about the Immortal's the more real it seems. Then that whole incident with Petra and the magic book...it is getting kind of hard to deny."

"Yeah..." Jesse said.

Alex had been right about her amulet glowing thing. Steve had wanted to talk to her and well, him too. He hadn't been exactly happy to hear that Petra nearly killed herself in a magical overdose. But she was doing exceptionally better when they arrived, only a minor headache - something about head butting Steve.

"Steve wants to tell us something?" Lukas had said.

"And that would be what?" Jesse asked.

Steve was whispering a message into Alex's ear, clearing filling her in on the details. He piped up, "We're telling you about the Dark One."

Jesse recognized the name, "Ok~ay~?"

Steve sighed, "How to explain this...um...He's real."

Steve and Alex then proceeded to give a very lengthy history lesson on how the Dark One was the
secret Lost Immortal, someone who had come before the Healer.

"It wasn't till after the First struck down the Lost One, that the Healer was made." Alex explained, "The people of the First World erased him from history, and the Dark one took his place. All the writings about the Dark One destroying the world aren't about Notch's Brother, but his second son."

"So that's what I saw then," Petra asked, "I saw this Lost One, this forgotten immortal?"

Steve slowly nodded, "Yeah, you probably did."

"If the First killed him though, why is everyone afraid to mention his name, why do they let the false stories keep going?" Lukas asked.

"They're still afraid." Alex said quietly, "As long as people don't know the truth they're fine with it. As long as no one speaks his name."

"Why?"

"Names are power here," Steve stated simply, "They're afraid it will bring him back."

Jesse found himself unnaturally bothered by this sudden new information. He wondered if Ivor would have anything on it. Steve told him later the only reason he and Alex shared anything at all was because Jesse and the others didn't know the Immortal's true name. But he still wanted them to be prepared in case they suffered any more unwanted visions.

"Jesse are you alright?"

He looked over his shoulder to see Lukas looking hard his way, "Yeah why?"

"You seem, I dunno, kinda out of it."

"I'm just tired."

"Did something happen in the hallway?"

Lukas was prodding, trying to get him to open up a little. Jesse knew that much. He caught on to Lukas's need to be supportive long ago. He thought about the dead world and the pig. He wanted to tell Lukas, he really did...but there was no point. "No, nothing really interesting."

"Jesse-"

"I got turned into half a fish," Jesse said, "And there was a lot of swimming and that's what happened, so I'm tired. Kay?" He turned away, tearing off his shirt and pulling on his own nightwear.

He heard Lukas sigh, and could feel his gaze on the back of his neck. But Lukas relented, letting his question drop, "Half a fish huh?"

"Yep, gills and everything."

"Interesting..."

"Yep!"

Petra entered the guest room, having changed in the bathroom. She was brushing her hair out, "Hey guys! What are you talking about?" She asked.
"Jesse got turned into half a fish," Lukas said evenly.

"Woah? Really? That's intense."

Jesse yanked back the covers of his bed, "Not as intense as you time traveling via your mind."

"It was pretty crazy," Petra said down on her bed, "Can you believe there was another Immortal that none of us knew about? That nobody knew about."

"Yeah, it kinda gives me the creeps." Lukas admitted.

Jesse didn't say anything on the subject, "Listen, I'm gonna go to sleep guys."

Petra paused, "Really? Okay, um, sleep well?"

"Yeah, hope you get some rest." Lukas added.

"Mm, thanks," he fell onto his pillows, sleep quickly grabbing hold. He felt bad pushing Lukas away, but he didn't need people looking after him. He didn't want anyone to. People got hurt when they had his back...

Like Reuben.

He slipped off to sleep, his mind crammed full of turmoil.

Jesse wouldn't risk it again.

Petra waited till Jesse's breathing changed so she knew he was out, which didn't take long. She looked to Lukas, "Did you ask him?"

"Yeah," Lukas frowned.

"And?"

"What do you think he told me?"

"Nothing." Petra sighed. She had noticed immediately something was off about Jesse the moment he had returned to the house. She knew something besides fish tales had happened in the Hallway. "Lukas, I'm worried," she whispered.

Lukas glanced over at the sleeping brunet, "I am too," he said solemnly. "I'm grateful for Steve and Alex's help. But ever since we've come here I've noticed things..."

"Yeah?"

"He's pushing us away,"

"Do you think Steve and Alex have anything to do with it?"

He shook his head, "No. I think they really mean to help, I just think..." he sighed.

"What?" Petra asked.

"I think Jesse's giving up Petra."
Jesse knew he was dreaming the moment mother nature cried out.

Literally.

Thunder roared so loud and hard that the very bed on which he lay shook. His eyes shot open and he quickly sat up. He was in his own body and not looking through the eyes of someone else he confirmed. A swift sweep of his surroundings revealed a dim one roomed house.

It partially reminded him of the cabin by the river. There was the one bed in which he was in, a chair, a table, a furnace and a crafting table. There were books, not nearly as many as the ones in the actual cabin, but there were still books.

It was quaint.

But the air was tense, and Jesse could detect the faint whiff of fire and smoke. He couldn't see much outside, it was nighttime. Only the occasional flash of lightning illuminated the forest, joined by a distant faint glow added his vision. Something was very wrong.

The front door slammed open suddenly and Jesse flinched in surprise as a young man entered the house.

"Father!" the male yelled.

Jesse stared wide eyed at the stranger. He was littered with so many injuries it was a wonder how he still stood, much less breathed. He bled profusely from multiple lacerations all over his body. The burns on his arms seemed beyond repair. Jesse couldn't even make out a face. The upper right part was covered in bandages stained nearly black with blood. The only part that remained unscathed was the male's brilliant blue left eye, currently filled to the brim with fury.

"Father!"

Jesse recognized the voice immediately however, he was positive it was the warrior he had seen through the eyes of in his last dream. And now with the new information provided by Steve and Alex, and Petra's vision he wondered...

Was this the First?

"I know you can hear me!" The possible immortal demanded, "Father!"

Outside lighting flashed and thunder boomed, then the rain began.

There was a single deafening crack, and a blinding flash that lit up the single room house in a white flare. When the darkness reclaimed it's domain and Jesse could once again see, the room had not changed. Save for the single cloaked figure sitting in the chair.

Jesse let out a weak exhale.

Father, as in...

Jesse couldn't see detail, but by the grey streaks in the long black beard, he assumed the new comer was fairly older. It bothered him that he couldn't see the upper part of the old man's face. No matter where Jesse adjusted himself in the bed, the upper half remained concealed in shadow, evening when the lighting flashed.

"What is it my son?" He asked. The man's voice sounded painfully familiar to Jesse, but he couldn't
The youth, seemingly unfazed by the other's sudden and noisy arrival went into a rage, "How could you not know?! Your son H-

"I know very well," The elder cut off, "But do not speak his name. You know what our names do."

"He killed them!" the man's voice cracked, "He killed your people!"

"Yes...I know."

"I- I tried to stop him, but-" the male looked at the sword in his hands, stained in blood. Jesse noted the diamond blade was cracked, "But I could not dissuade him. You have to remove his immortality!" The warrior demanded eyes full of tears. "I wounded him, but like my own marks they will soon heal! You must make him mortal!"

"I cannot."

"Cannot or will not?!"

"Cannot, you and your brother are your own beings." The old man explained, "I cannot strip you of what you are."

"Then you sentence your creations to death!"

"I did not say that."

"But you will do nothing?!" The First spat.

"You do not realize what you ask of me! He is your brother-"

"I am asking you to end him! Simple as that!"

Jesse jumped slightly as the old man frowned, the heavens themselves roaring with thunder, "You ask me to murder my child!"

The warrior glared, "He cares not for you nor I anymore. You stand by and do nothing while blood spills from his hands!" he cried.

"Are your hands not bloody?" The elder demanded.

The other flinched, "Those men were evil."

"And who are you to judge good and evil?"

"Someone must since you show no love for your children."

Thunder roared and the house shook, to the point where Jesse actually fell out of the bed and onto his knees as the elder stood sharply up.

"Do not lecture me on my love of you or the mortals!" The elder said, "I weep for those lost! I weep for your brother! I weep for you! You ask me to kill one of my own. Has your heart harden so since this began that you would kill your own brother? The same one our people prayed would come to you so that you may no suffer a lonely immortal life?"

"Who gave me that life?!" The Immortal yelled throwing his sword into the floor, embedding it into
the wood, "How choose that for me?!"

The storm's ferocity died out, if only for a second. And the old man sat down. "I see."

The tension in the air was suffocating and thick as neither party moved.

Finally the younger man let out a heavy sigh," I am sorry. But He has to go Father..." The First said softly, "He stopped being my brother the moment he turned his blade in hate." He kneeled at the old man's feet, grasping his father's hand, "I am begging you to help me. I will not ask you to kill him. But I do ask you give me the means of which to defeat him."

The elder was silent.

"Father?"

Finally after a moment, "If you go to the witches of the Adamans they have enchantments..."

"Magic isn't going to -"

"You will find there what you seek. I hope you find the strength to go through with it. For you do not realize what you truly wish. "

There was a flash of light, and the elder was gone, leaving only Jesse and the Immortal.

The Immortal sighed, dropping his hands onto his thighs, "I will do what must be done Father." he said softly. He stood, yanking the sword from the ground and exited the home, "He means nothing to me."

The door closed and Jesse was left alone in the dark, with nothing but the receding storm. He leaned back against the bed frame, taking slow deep breaths. Why was his heart pounding so?

This had to be a dream right? Something he had forged in his own mind...

This couldn't be a vision.

But why wasn't he awake now?

Shakily standing, Jesse inspected to room, moving slowly around. He couldn't touch anything, couldn't open a book, or even move the blankets on the bed.

He was stuck.

"Jesse..."

Jesse whipped around, to find the front door was cracked open. Hadn't the Immortal closed it? There was a soft orange glow coming from beyond the wood work, and a faint rumble that didn't sound like thunder.

Jesse slowly advanced on the door, finding he could open it. He pushed it open and stepped through. Immediately the door and the one roomed house vanished behind him.

Present before him was a vast and lavish dining hall. With a large stone table over fifty feet long and lined with hundreds of chairs. There were ornate and massive tapestries hanging from the high ceiling. All the designs were unique and seemed incredibly complicated; all the art down to even the animals was intricate and full of twists and knots.
But everything looked abandoned, the rug was turned up in some places, there was broken dishes on the floor, food on the table. Like everyone had left in a hurry

Where in the world was he?

Suddenly Jesse was moving. Fast paced, hard, driven. He exited the dining room, making his way down a long narrow hallway, torches guiding him. He had to go this way; he needed to go this way. He didn't know why but he had to.

Jesse opened a large black door, surprised by how warm the handle was-

It was city. He stepped out onto a massive flat surface, thousands of feet wide. High above was a brilliant moon. He knew now he was in the mouth of a colossal volcano.

Mt. Incendia.

The city was built all along the walls, layer upon layer. Grand houses, exquisite shops, an amphitheater, you name it. Jesse walked to a large bridge cutting across a canyon. The hundred foot drop led to the inferno below. Lava, lots of it, a whole river in fact, burned and sizzled far down.

Behind him from where he had come was a castle, tall, and imposing. Lava running through tubes built into the wall.

Across the bridge in the middle of a large court was a stone table surround by a dozen chairs, and two high back thrones.

There was a person in one of them.

An angry roar cut through the volcano's constant rumbling and Jesse felt the hair on his arm rise.

Jesse whipped around just as the First burst from a side door in the castle. His wounds seemed healed, but Jesse couldn't make out a face again because the demigod was now clad in diamond armor.

The figure from the chair stood, arms outstretched, "Brother!"

The Immortal marched across the clearing stopping at the bridge's end, "I am no brother of yours, you murderous traitor!"

The other scoffed taking his own stop at the other end, "Traitor you call me? Bah! I am a God among men, I do what I see fit to them. I am no traitor." he pointed, "If anyone is a traitor, it is you to me."

The other male was younger than the First, but more thickly built and his skin a shade darker. His eyes were a dark chocolate brown, and hair so dark and rich if it wasn't for the lava light it would look black. He was armed, but he didn't have armor. He reminded Jesse vaguely of Steve. But using Steve as a comparison felt like an insult to him. The other again, was thicker, younger, and by far meaner looking than the kind man.

The First snarled, spitting on the ground, "You attacked the people."

The Lost one sneered, "And you chose them over me. And here you are now, so afraid of me you come in full armor. Is it truly to be like this?"

Silently, the First drew his blade.

The second Immortal went silent, looking down for only a moment, "So be it..." he said quietly,
almost impossible to hear over the rumble of lava. He stuck out his hand, summoning a blade from the volcanic fumes itself. The sword was diamond, but it was as black as obsidian, absorbing all light cast upon it, "You have decided your fate."

They lunged at each other.

The moment the swords connected sparks flew and air currents hot and fast tore away from the point of impact and the ground cracked directly beneath them.

The Lost pivoted around his brother, trying to catch him in the back. But the other rolled forward, leaping high in the air and coming down at one end of the bridge. Then fast as lightning, almost too quick for any normal human to react, the First lunged back, his sword pointed like a javelin.

The younger blocked. "Ironic that it is here I face you. I search for days only for you to draw me here, where it all began."

"We built our legacy here!" The older yelled, "And here I will tear it down!" he slammed his sword on top of the other, who managed to block at the cost of his knees giving out.

"You can't defeat me!" the Lost cried, "I cannot defeat you!" he shoved the other off, attempting to stab, "With our immortal blessing, what are we doomed to fight till judgment day and trumpets sound?"

"I wouldn't be so sure!" the First barked, he yanked a dagger from his boot - curved at one point, blue, and sharp - stabbing at his brother. The other lunged to the side, the secondary weapon only managing to scrap the outer layer of his arm drawing blood immediately.

Screaming in rage he spun a kicked, sending the dagger skittering away. He tore the sleeve off his tunic, "You insult my with a dragon's toothpick!"

The First took a step back glaring.

The Lost looked at his arm, and Jesse did to, the wound was still there, not healing. The Lost hissed, "What did you do!"

"Enchantments," The First snarled, "From the Adaman's witches. It took a large portion of my strength, but I was able to make the runes. I have placed them deep within our city, as long as we're here. ...We will not heal."

"You dare spout lies?!"

The First tapped his helmet with his sword, "Why do you think I came armored?"

The Lost took a step back, and Jesse swore there was surprise maybe even fear in his eyes before turning into pure unbridled rage. "Bastard!" he dashed towards a tunnel, presumably an exit.

The First yanked a large chunk out of the ground, about twenty feet in diameter and hurled it past his fleeing opponent. It crashed into the tunnel caving it in, the gust of air sending the younger falling back. He hacked and coughed from the ground, spitting away a mouthful of blood where some debris had hit his mouth.

"One of us will die here brother," The First stated firmly, "One stab of the heart and you can be sure of that."

The Lost snarled, slamming his hilt against the ground, "So be it!" he sprang up swinging hard and
The older immortal responded by yanking clear another chunk of rock, this time a pillar from one of the supports. It sent about fifteen arches collapsing and part of the floor above. He hurled it at his brother; attempting to force the other to dodge.

Instead of going up and over, the Lost cut through the stone with his blade, roaring, and slicing up.

"Augh!" The First stumbled back, his helmet knocked clean off as the younger cut up the side of his face. His head dropped back down, angrily panting. His new injury was a jagged gash running up his face, starting underneath the left side of his jaw, cutting up his face and past his right eye and into his hair line. Azure blue eyes glare through shaggy brown hair. Some of the blood dripped down into his eye, but he blinked it away creating a tear line of blood. For a minute Jesse thought he looked actually like Steve.

"So you truly can't heal either," The Lost remarked. He licked the blood on his blade, "This should be fun."

Soon everything fell in the battle that followed, nothing was spared. Buildings, obsidian, diamond all of it. The bridge over the river was destroyed; the canyon itself had collapsed in several places and was now wider and very unstable.

The First screamed in pain as the Lost threw him through one of the throne chairs, he slid across the floor leaving a long smear of blood from his many wounds. He came to a stop just at the edge of the chasm next to his dagger, groaning in pain.

"This could have been our kingdom!" the Lost screamed. "We could have ruled together!" He leapt up, ready to stab down.

Crying out weather from grief or perhaps from pain, the First jabbed his arms up, summoning fire from the lava below.

The wave of inferno hit the Lost dead on, and he screamed in agony as the intense weapon of nature seared his skin, cracking the flesh like dried earth. He stumbled down just short of the older immortal. The First himself grabbed his dagger and slashed outward-
Right across his brother's eyes.

The Lost shouted a raw intense sound. He collapsed to the ground, clutching his ruined eyes with newly scorched blistering hands.

The First lunged up pinning the younger down and stopping his dagger at his throat, his hands shaking. "Y-yield...this-this is your last chance."

There was silence, save for the growing growl of an unstable volcanic city.

The second immortal slowly lowered his hands, milky white eyes staring at the sky, "You're still weak in the end..." he mumbled.

The First swallowed thickly, the sweat mixing with the blood on his face, creating a red river over his skin, "I will do what needs to be done."

"You can't."

"I will!"

The Lost laughed weakly, "I can still see you brother, even with my ruined eyes...You are trying to save everything," he laughed again and coughed up blood, "But you can't."

The First's hand shook violently, barely able to keep the dagger steady.

"You can't" he laughed. "But you might as well brother...my dear primus." he spat, "Because I know where your heart lies now, and you will never choose me over them."

"I-I-"

"Kill me now, because I will spend the rest of eternity making your life hell. I will never stop trying to take away everything from you. So do it!"

The First froze.

"DO IT!"

He stabbed.

The gleaming dagger went through the Lost Ones throat and he stiffened, before going lax. "I knew it..." he gurgled out. His eyes slipped close, and the Lost One went limp. His skin turned waxy fading to dust, muscle, bone, all of it turned to sand, swept away by the volcano's currents.

Gone.

The First sat there frozen and stiff, a single tear sliding down his ragged cheek.

Jesse felt his hear pulse. He was hit with an overwhelming wave of grief. He remembered what the old man said:

*I hope you find the strength to go through with it. For you do not realize what you truly wish.*

Reality began its painful attack. Another tear fell, then another, followed by river of emotion. Shaking and clutching his dagger close, the First let out a heartbroken wail. He screamed and fell deeper against the ground, grieving his shoulders jerking with each heaving sob, "BROTHER!"
Jesse woke up, covered in sweat, and with tears streaming down his face, forced to swallow this visions lesson. There was no possible way that had been a dream...

The First hadn't realized the true result of his rage till it was too late

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer:

Sections of the Immortal's Poem at the beginning are based off of the Dreamworks film Prince of Egypt song called The Plagues. All rights for the lyrics belong to the writers and Dreamworks Animation Studio.

Art Belongs to LunaDestiny
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The fighting had gone for hours, and we prayed fervently to our Maker to protect the First. Guide his hand, strike down the monster in the inferno.

After weeks of hell and death, it seemed Notch finally answered the prayer.

He came down from Mt. Incendia, saying the deed had been done. But he was not the same man who had gone up the mountain. There had been rage and revenge driving him into the battle.

Now there was only grief.

Our Immortal was now alone.

The Hallway was peaceful, just a continuous hum of magic.

Then it wasn't

Steve ran out of a portal screaming and cursing in his old tongue -a squid wrapped around his head. Jesse followed not shortly after, he too was screaming, but he wasn't cursing. Reuben always hated it when he cursed and some habits just died hard.

Steve was trying to yank the squid off his face, "Shut the door! Shut the door!" his cried, voice muffled.

"I'm trying!" Jesse yelped. He yanked out stone from his inventory, dodging a laser that flew out of the portal.

"Hurry!"

"I am!"

Steve yanked the sea creature off, hurling it through the portal just as Jesse put down the last block.

The Hallway fell back into its peaceful melody. This time joined by the gasping breaths of two very exhausted males.

Steve started laughing, "Oh sweet Notch." he laughed harder.

Jesse collapsed onto the floor still trying to get his breath back; he failed to see the humor in their near death scenario. But Steve's laughter was infectious for lack of better word, and Jesse soon giggled a little himself.

Steve wiped a happy tear from his eye, "I gotta say that has to be a first for me. Laser shooting squids. What in the old man's beard was Notch thinking?"

"Bad day maybe?"

"What do you even call a bad day for the creator of the cosmos?" the older man wondered, "Builder's Block? Notch I don't know, but we are never going back through that door."
Jesse got up and moved himself to a stack of stone blocks, resting as Steve put down a warning sign.

This hadn't been a good day. Jesse was already tired from his disturbing dream slash vision. These past few days he was afraid to fall asleep, afraid to see something else. Everything so far today had gone horribly wrong; it was one bad door after another. First he and Steve had landed in a water world - no tails this time. Luckily Steve had enough wood to make a boat, but they were stuck rowing for three hours till they found the exit door again.

Then there was the world that was another modifier. It had turned them into...well... a hybrid *something*. But Jesse still had the nasty longing to chase and eat sheep.

After that, it was a world full of pigman, which hadn't been bad till they realized they were *aggressive* pigman.

And don't even get him started on the world with mirrors. It was trippy and wrong and so very weird. Steve told him not to look at any too long, but he did anyway. What he saw was the Withers events, and Olivia and Axel, and Rueben and him. But it wasn't exactly him; at least he didn't think so.

Last he checked he wasn't female.

Then there were the blasted laser shooting squids...

Thinking about Olivia and Axel made his heart ache, and he sighed heavily.

Steve heard him; he sat down next to Jesse, "What's up kiddo?"

"I'm just thinking about home,"

"I see."

"I just wish there was some way I could change it, you know?" Jesse said, "If there was any way I could go back and tell myself...Don't go through that portal. I would do it. I wonder what would have happened if I hadn't. What if..."

Steve was silent for a moment, "*What ifs* are dangerous."

Jesse looked up at Steve, seeing the older male staring off into nowhere, his eyes distant, "*What ifs* lead to *if only* and those lead to *I wish*..."

"I don't understand."

"Well before I say anything, there is nothing wrong with thinking *what if.*" Steve explained, "There is nothing wrong with looking back and wondering how you could do things differently, or looking back on a memory, it's not bad. But the *dwelling* on it is the dangerous thing."

"You start out normal at first. What if I hadn't gone left or right? What if I had stayed home? For you it be what if I hadn't gone through the portal. You think, well, you'd still be home for one thing. You probably wouldn't be as weary as you are now, probably happier too. But then...then it turns into *if only*. If only I hadn't gone through that portal and that's when things get bad."

"Before you know it, you're wishing you did all the things you didn't do. I wish I had gone into that portal, I wish I had stayed home." Steve looked down at Jesse, "You'll get so caught up on wishing you could change what happened you completely miss what is happening *now.*"
Jesse looked down at his knees, "I never really thought of that..."

Steve put an arm over his shoulder, "There is nothing wrong with looking back. There is no harm regretting a little. You just have to not fester in it, or you'll miss all the important things that happen now. I've had a lot of what ifs in my life," he admitted. "It's enough to drive a person mad if they wish too much."

Jesse returned his gaze to Steve, "How do you not dwell in it then?"

The adult leaned back against the wall, "If I ever look back, I find it helps to find the silver lining in my decisions, the good things that came out of them. It's the only thing that keeps me sane.

Jesse thought on this, "I got to see new worlds...We've met a lot of new people, um-

"You're doing good, keep going." Steve encouraged.

"We're friends with Aiden now, and that is really cool. I've gotten to know Lukas Petra and Ivor a little better."

"There you go,"

"And..." Jesse said attentively, "I'm glad I got to meet you an Alex."

Steve grinned giving his shoulder a squeeze, "I'm glad we met you too kiddo. Having you and the others around has been an incredible adventure, I haven't had this much fun with anyone in a long time."

Jesse smiled but it faltered.

Steve noticed, "Jesse...are you alright?"

"Yeah- yeah," Jesse rubbed the back of his neck, "I was just, well..."

"Yes?"

"I really like it here, like a lot. It just feels so natural, and I really do like being around you and Alex," Jesse said slowly, "And maybe I could just-"

"Wait hold up kiddo!" Steve cut in.

Jesse stopped, looking at the other hesitant and scared.

Steve swallowed thickly then, "I know what you're going to say...and Jesse...you can't."

"What do you mean can't?" he felt his insides clench.

"Jesse you can't stay here, you can't stay in the First World."

Feeling shocked at Steve's rejection he got up, "I see."

"Jesse wait-"

"No I get it."

"Jesse!" Steve turned him around, "You can't give up on this. What about Olivia and Axel?"

He stiffened.
"Think about them for just a second." Steve pressed desperately, "What are they ever going to think if you don't come home?! They are going to spend the rest of their lives wondering what happened to you and they will never know. Think about your other friends too. Lukas and Petra can't get home without you Jesse! They need your help as much as you-"

"I can't keep doing this!" Jesse burst.

"What?"

No tears would come but Jesse felt like he could cry, "I can't keep going! I can't stand to look through another door! Do you know how many portals we have gone through? One hundred and seventy four! That's one hundred and seventy four disappointments! One hundred and seventy four failures!" he gritted his teeth, "Yours if we count it would be one hundred seventy five, and how many doors have we visited since I met you?! How many worlds has Notch made?! I can't keep facing this anymore! I'm tired Steve! I just...we're never going to find home..." he looked down.

Steve was silent, then he gently grabbed Jesse's chin, lifting his head up so they can see eye to eye, "Jesse..."

He wouldn't look directly at him.

"Jesse look at me."

Jesse did, albeit reluctantly, "Yes?"

"If you do this, it's your choice." Steve said, "I won't stop you. But think about this. Thirty years from now, you're going to look back. You're going to look at that portal, and you're going to think...What if."

Something clicked back into place in Jesse's mind and he shakily leaned into Steve's hand, his entire body wracked with emotion even though no tears came. "O-oh my Gods....I- I would have..."

Steve made a gentle shushing sound, pulling Jesse into a warm embrace, "I can't imagine how hard this must be for you and your friends. I really can't. But you can't give up Jesse."

"It's just so hard," he moaned, his voice muffled by Steve's shirt.

"I promise, I will not stop looking till we find them. I swear on my grave."
Jesse slowly pulled away, "I can't believe I-

"We all have weak moments kiddo," Steve assured, "You're only human." he ran fingers through Jesse's hair. "Honestly, I think we all need a break. The festival is in two days. Why don't we rest until then, then go to the party and enjoy ourselves for once?"

Jesse nodded, "That does sound nice." he admitted.

The adult male smiled softly, "How about we head home, I think I'm done."

"Kay."Jesse agreed.

The pair turned, heading for their exit door.

Steve threw his arm around his shoulder, "How are you at dancing anyway?"

"Horrible." Jesse said.

"Oh good, no competition then,"

Jesse laughed, then he smiled, 'Hey Steve?"

"Hmmm?"

"Thank you."

Steve looked fondly ahead, "Anytime for you Jesse, anytime."

"Jesse,"

Jesse peeked one eye open groggily looking around the dim room until he finally found the clock.

5:22 p.m.

It wasn't even sundown yet.

True to Steve's word the last few days had been spent just resting. Lukas and Petra had been okay with the plan, they were both tired as well. Lukas admitted he was just a little interested in the traditions of the Festival.

Sleep had come easier for Jesse, his talk with Steve had put him back in a better state of mind. He hadn't dreamed at all these past few nights.

Today was the day of the festival; Alex had taken them to the village while Steve was out running errands. Opening day was always the most busy and bustling according to the female.

It was only stalls and shops that were open in the day, some children playing with streamers and toys, and the occasional gypsy dancer. The real festival started at night. There were races and dancing, plays being held, games and competitions, the big opening night for the three day party.

After returning to the house, Alex suggested that everyone rest and take an afternoon nap.

"Cause we are going to be up late," she laughed, eyes sparkling.

But Jesse's nap was now over.
He rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and yawned, the curtains were closed, but he could make out traces of sunlight - the last of the fall colors before the sun went down.

Lukas and Petra were still asleep, clinging to the last of their afternoon naps.

There were muffled voices coming from downstairs. He figured Alex and Steve must already be up.

He rose from the bed, pausing momentarily to stretch the stiffness out of his limbs; before leaving the guest room. He closed the door carefully behind him, not wanting to wake his friends.

His nose tingled, Alex was cooking something, probably a light meal before everyone headed out.

He stepped onto the stairs, the wood was cold from the climate temperature dropping. It would be winter here very soon. The well built stairs only creaked slightly as he descended to the first floor.

"... You looked beautiful."

Jesse stopped halfway down the oak stairs.

"Thank you, you don't look half bad yourself handsome."

Realizing that Steve and Alex were having and intimate and private moment, Jesse sat down on the stairs not wanting to interrupt them.

The kitchen door was open, and he could see inside from where he sat between the floor levels. He spotted the couple by the island counter.

Both had clearly been getting ready for the party. Alex wore a forest green tunic. There was a wide waist sash wrapped around her midsection, made out of a golden weave. Her hair was intricately braided with small glass beads woven into the thick tresses. The braid itself settled comfortably over her shoulder. She sported blue drop earrings in her ears, matching of course her magical trademark amulet. "I'll admit, it has been awhile since I've dressed up like this," she said as she tugged at the blue stone.

Steve had dawned a similar styled tunic, though his was red, rich and deep in color, with a similar golden sash around his waist. He didn't have any jewelry, save for his own amulet which glinted brightly. But he was freshened up, having shaved out of place hairs from his face. "You're beautiful as ever," he smiled, "Just like the day I met you."

Alex scoffed, "I doubt I looked that beautiful as you bled everywhere."

Jesse smiled to himself and tried not to picture Steve with an arrow up his rear fawning over Alex.

"Even with an arrow up my ass," Steve assured.

"I recall you being mad."

"Madly in love."

"Oh good Notch Steve! That's tacky."

Jesse smiled against the stair post watching as Steve took his wife into his arms.
"You know you love it," he said, "I know it has been awhile, but we'll have fun I promise. Perhaps, we'll even dance tonight?"

Alex hummed, rocking with the male's slow and steady movements, "Perhaps..."

"I honestly haven't seen you this happy in a long time."

She rested her cheek on his shoulder, "It has been nice having the kids here."

"Yes, yes it has..." the man agreed.

"I almost wish they could stay," Alex sighed, "But that wouldn't be fair to them though.

Jesse leaned into the railing, thinking about his conversation with Steve two days prior. Then his eyebrows shot up as Steve spoke of it.

"Jesse wanted to stay."

Alex was surprised, "He what? Really?"

"I talked him out of it," Steve said sadly, "He's been having a hard time. I wanted so badly to say yes Alex. I would have loved for him to stay but...Alex, we have to help them get home."

"I know I just...I wonder you know?" her voice cracked a little, "Is this what it would have been like? With our little one? Would we have stopped with one or kept going? Who would their friends be? Would our house been full of laughter and - and-"

"Shhhh, I know." Steve soothed, pulling her closer, "I wish I knew too, I really do..."
Alex sighed.

"Of only we could change what happened Alex, if only we could, but we can't..."

_Can't what?_ Jesse wondered.

Jesse looked at the pair, sensing their overwhelming feeling of sadness even beyond the kitchen doors. He went to open his mouth-

"We should probably wake them," Alex said suddenly pulling away. "We need to get ready and eat, before the festival starts. I would like for them to see the historians play, I think Lukas would like that."

Steve let her go," You finish cooking, I'll go see if they are awake."

Jesse stood and quickly walked the rest of the way down the stairs, loud enough for the couple to hear his approach, "I'm up!" he put on a smile, "Lukas and Petra are still out. You look amazing Alex."

"Thank you," she smiled back, no evidence on her face of the grief Jesse had just witnessed. She reached across ruffling his hair, "You look like you just go out of bed."

He smiled.

"I got your armor cleaned." Alex stated, "I can go get it so you can put it on-"

"Uh-" Jesse said, hesitating as Alex stopped and waited for him to speak. He glanced over at Steve. The adult was smiling as he checked the cooking. He returned his gaze to Alex "I think I'll leave the armor home tonight actually."

From the corner of his eye he saw Steve smile brighter.

Alex raised an eyebrow, "Are you sure?"

"Yeah," Jesse answered, a little more confident the second time, "Steve said there might be dancing and a lot of running around. I know it's fall and all, but with thousands of people crowded together, that might get a little hot..."

Alex thought for a moment, "I um, I have a tunic, that might fit you," she suggested, "It's a traditional tunic. But if you'd like to wear it instead of your usual shirt you can."

"Sure! That would be awesome! Thank you!"

A smile tugged at her lips, "Alright then, could you watch the food while I get it?" she headed for the stairs, "I'll go fetch it and wake up the others while I'm up there."

"Yeah I can do that!" he called after her, "And good luck waking up Petra!"

"I think I got it," she answered before disappearing to the next level.

Steve chuckled and patted Jesse on the shoulder giving it a squeeze, "If she can wake me, she can wake them."

Jesse smiled, leaning into the gesture, "No doubts at all."

"Yeah..." Steve let his hand drop, "I'm going to hitch the wagon."
Jesse faced him, "Do you want me to help after Alex comes back?"

"Naw I got it"

"You sure?"

"Yeah!" he winked. "Alex probably wants to do something with your hair anyway. She's funny like that. So I suggest you get a head start cleaning up before she gets her hands on you."

"Alrighty then" Jesse laughed.

Steve left and Jesse was alone in the kitchen with only the lingering silence and the cooking food.

In the silence his mind wandered back to the scene before he entered the kitchen. The atmosphere was staggeringly different. And in the silence Jesse couldn't help but wonder...

What could have happened that, Alex and Steve wished so badly they could change? When they say little one do they mean...

A child?

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer:
Art by LunaDestiny
There was no celebration, no cries of victory...

Our enemy was gone, but we felt nothing on the matter, we had nothing left to feel.

We tended our wounded, and we buried our dead - the bodies that we could retrieve anyway. The rest - though they received a grave and a service - we could only give to Notch in spirit.

Someone suggested we reclaim our lost home, but no one really feels we should. Our once peaceful and happy village now holds too much grief for us to bear.

Mt. Incendia is lost to us a well, nothing could still remain standing after the battle. Already the mines fill with spawns and other dark creatures. Besides...it was the Lost One who had helped build that magnificent city, and it is where his brother struck him down. We could not live in such a place.

The city council has decided that we will settle here, in the valley between the two graves. To the northwest will be Mt. Incendia, and to the southeast our lost home. We will settle here, so hopefully we never forget what could have become of us, what could have become of the world.

I look at Notch's creation; there is a scar in the beauty now, a subtle sadness in the wind. Even our home has been changed due to these events.

No one has seen the First, I believe he has retreated to his home to grieve. I pray for him, that he may join us here. It must be so lonely now, hiding away in his home - hidden by the ancient wood. I can't imagine what he's going through, what is he doing now?

Holding a funeral for one I suppose...

"Are you sure you're not uncomfortable?"

"Alex, they're awesome," Lukas laughed, "They're very comfortable."

"I meant I didn't want you to feel forced into wearing them,"

"You didn't force us to wear anything. But thank you for checking."

Long story short, Alex had a lot of tunics, "Okay, so I have more than one that might fit," she said as she trotted down the stairs with a stack of at least ten tunics, "I didn't know what color you might like so~." she placed them on the couch, "Have at them."

Course while Jesse was picking through the assorted colors, Lukas and Petra finally came downstairs. Lukas ended up joining him in the living room, curious on the clothing because 'oooh something for the journal!'.

"How about this one?" he suggested helpfully, pulling one out of the stack, "You like green don't you?"

Jesse took it, "Yeah, but Alex is already wearing green I don't think we should do doubles do you?" he pulled out a different one, "How about yellow?"
"Yellow isn't your color."

Jesse laughed, "Alright Mr. Fashionista, "

Lukas elbowed him, but his smile showed he took no offense to the statement.

Petra joined them in the living room and rested her arms on the back of the couch, "There are so many colors, I don't know how you're going to be able to pick just one."

"Why don't you guys join me," Jesse suggested. "We could all wear one."

"There is an idea!" Alex laughed from the kitchen.

"Oh we couldn't." Lukas pressed, "We're not the same size as you Jesse,"

"They're adjustable." Alex smiled.

"Well in that case," Petra reached into the pile.

"Are you sure it's alright?" Lukas asked.

"Yeah! We'll be a colorful and crazy group at the festival! You'll blend right in, no one will be able to tell you're from out of town!" the woman laughed. "We'll look like one big dysfunctional family."

Jessed ended up settling for a Prussian blue tunic with long sleeves and a silver sash, loving how cool and soft the sleeves felt on his arms.

Lukas decided on a rich royal purple, with a honey gold wide waist belt. And despite Petra teasing him a little, she and Jesse both confirmed that he rocked the color.

Petra herself decided to sport a burnt orange tunic accented by a bronze belt. With her red hair, Lukas said she looked like a walking inferno.

Minus the yellow- unless gold was counted - the entire party resembled a rainbow.

On the subject of rainbows, the town itself was a rainbow of lights, banners, streamers, and people. The humble village that Jesse had first seen weeks ago had turned into a plethora of color and life, turned into a dream.

At the edge of town where all the farmer's - now harvested- fields were packed to the brim with caravans and gypsy wagons. The party was already in full swing, people were dancing, playing music, telling tale and shooting off fireworks. Children ran between all the wagons, waving streamers and hand held sparklers.

Steve had to park the wagon at the edge of town, because there was no getting in. There had to be a few thousand people, minimum.

"Look at them all," Lukas said.

"There are a lot," Jesse agreed.

"And they're all here for the party," Petra grinned.

Steve hopped off the wagon and unhitched the horses, Alex jumped off, followed by Lukas then Petra. As Jesse was getting off he noticed Alex taking Gaea's reigns, "Where are you going?"
"I ran into Bach this morning at one of the shops while you kids were browsing," She explained, "He bet me that I couldn't win the obstacle race at the track-"

Steve snorted, mumbling something what sounded close to 'he should know better'.

"-Any way, I'm taking her to the stables before the race so she's ready. I'll meet you guys at the shops in the center square...Did you hear that Steve?"

"Ye~ah," he waved from the other side of Titan.

Alex rolled her eyes, winked at the teens, then departed.

Satisfied that the wagon would be fine Steve took a step back, "Alright, let's hit the town!"

The inner part of the city was even more crowded than the outer fields. Shops lined every available space, save for the open areas in the various and grand squares. The was at least one dance going on in each and every one of them. There were banners of buildings, cast over the streets, ribbons, yards and yard of fabrics. Children and artists painted on cobblestone. Musicians played on corners and singers and locals sang along.

Cheers and roars came from the race tracks, and Jesse looked up just in time to see two riders race by each other, each carrying seven foot long javelins.

"Did you see that!" Petra pointed.

Steve looked over, "Jousting," he said.

"Steve!" a swarm of children surround the man faster than flies to fruit, all shouting various things and trying to get his attention.

Jesse took a step back from the swarm laughing, he bumped into Lukas. "Well isn't he popular," the blond stated.

Steve was kneeling down, trying to take time for each one till they were satisfied. Jesse noticed how good he was with them. He was like a natural father...

One girl in a purple tunic with black hair tugged on Steve's sleeve.

"Stevey!"

"Yes Kasumi?" he asked.

"You and Alex have to catch the legacy play!"

"I will, I catch it every year,"

"But I made some of the costumes this year," Kasumi said, "You don't forget to look for the creeper costume okay?"

"I will."

"Thanks Stevey!"

"Hey Jesse," Lukas said, pulling him from the scene, he had to raise his voice to be heard over the din, "Look at that," He pointed over to a stand where a man and woman shaped glass sculptures, in various shapes colors and styles. The woman was blowing into a tube the hot liquid glass slowly
expanding into a very hot bubble.

"Glass blowing."

They both jumped, "Alex!" Lukas gasped.

She grinned, "Sorry didn't mean to scare you."

"No, no, just startled."

"The Legacy Play is starting soon do any of you want to see it?"

Jesse's grinned, "Yeah!" he looked to Petra, who was still watching the jousting, "Petra!"

She looked over.

"Wanna catch the play!"

"Yeah!" she worked her way over, weaving through the people. "I'm game."

"Well grab Steve, and we'll head," Alex grinned as she began walking.

Jesse turned around, seeing the swarm of kids still around Steve. He was giving small fireworks to them. Jesse started to make his way over-

A kid crashed into his legs and they both tumbled to the ground.

"Oh my goodness! I am so sorry!" A woman helped him up, pulling the child up as well, "Renaldo, what did I tell you about running without looking where you are going?" She scolded.

"It's okay," Jesse assured.

"I'm sorry," the little boy mumbled, he looked to what Jesse assumed now was the mother, "Can I please go see the dancers now?"

The woman sighed, "Yes, just be careful."

The kid squealed and raced off.

"I really am sorry," she said to Jesse.

"It's fine, it really is," He glanced around, discovering that he could no longer see Steve in the throng of people...or Alex...or his friends apparently.

"You look so much like them,"

Jesse returned his gaze to the woman, "I'm sorry what?"

"Your parents," she smiled, "You look a lot like them."

Jesse was thrown for a loop; "You know my parents?" he didn't even know about his parents.

"Jesse!" Steve came in from behind, grabbing his shoulders and looking a little out of breath, "I've been looking for you."

"Oh good, cause I got lost,"
The female smiled, "I'm afraid my child crashed into yours."

Both Jesse and Steve went wide eyed, "Child?" they both echoed.

"You look so much alike," she smiled.

"Oh he's not mine." Steve laughed.

"Really?!" she seemed genuinely shocked, "I could have sworn-"

"It's okay," Steve smiled, he handled it gracefully.

"I am sorry!" now she was embarrassed.

"Well, what can I say," Steve said, wrapping an arm around Jesse, "I tend to hang with younger copies of myself. We like to throw people off."

She laughed still embarrassed, "But of course," she pointed toward the square, "I better go get my um little one. Enjoy the festival." then she quickly retreated.

Jesse was still at a loss for words, "Ummm..."

"Where are the others?" Steve asked instead. Thankfully pushing the thought of the conversation away.

"They went to the play in the arena, I went to get you but I crashed into her kid and well...you caught the last bit."

Steve turned him around, "Arena is that way," he tilted his head, "Judging by the music I think the show is already go, we'll have to catch the next one."

"How long is it?"

"Not very long. We'll stroll through the shops and catch the next one. Sound like a plan?"

"Sounds good." Jesse said, though his mind wandered back to the woman and her words.

Steve guided him up to the top part of the amphitheater seats, the rest having thoroughly been filled. Despite being in the back however, they had a pretty good view of the stage and the sound traveled well. The stage was dimly lit and there was nothing on it, but the music was increasing, it would start soon.

"How many times do they do this?" Jesse asked.

"Five or six times tonight," Steve said.

"So what's it about?"

"You'll see in a sec, it's about to start," he gestured to the seat next to him, inviting Jesse to join him.

A village elder got up on the arena's nearby podium, the theater fell into a hushed silence as the music reached peak volume. The man raised his arms, deep voice echoing across the theater as the tale began.

Jesse's face flushed, "Umm, Steve?"
He looked casually over, "Hm? Oh!" then his eyes widened, "Old tongue!"

"Yeah, I don't understand," Jesse laughed softly. He looked around the amphitheater; the villagers were all listening attentively. "Does everyone here speak it?"

"Yes, but don't worry. I'll translate what's going on for you. Lucky for us both it's a narration not a speaking play."

A single man entered the stage, stepping in time to the music as the narrator continued. As the actor moved through his dance, various props and animals were lifted or placed on the stage. Slowly his surroundings became more colorful as the stage was filled.

"That's Notch," Steve explained as the narrator continued on, "He's creating the world."

Suddenly 'Notch' looked around in confusion. He scratched his beard, checking carefully over each plant and each creature. But his expression stated something was clearly missing from all of his handiwork.

The narrator laughed, and stated a single phrase, "Primo Homine, the Immortalem," Cheers and shouts rose up from the audience.

Steve grinned, "I probably don't have to translate this bit."

"The Immortal?" Jesse grinned back.

"Bingo."

Notch beamed, as if hearing the call of the crowd. He snapped his fingers, and another actor appeared on the stage, strong and youthful.

"There's the first human," Steve whispered, humored.

The First raced excitedly around the stage, admiring everything as it was all new to him. Notch chased him around the platform, attempting to slow him down and explain everything.

"I wonder if the first human was really like that." Jesse mused.

"I think...he would have still been figuring out how to walk. Probably fell on his face a few times..." Steve answered thoughtfully.

"What's going on now?" Jesse watched as Notch - having caught the First's attention said a few words and departed.

"He has given him his blessing and the wish to live his life," the adult whispered, "And now he is exploring."

The First traversed everywhere on the set, occasionally putting something together or discovering a shiny object. At one point he stuck his head behind the curtain, inspecting a mysterious shape in the shadows of the stage. Moments later however he was comically chased across the stage by an adorable child in a creeper costume. Jesse wondered if it was the one Kasumi made as the audience laughed.

Jesse heard Steve laugh, "I feel you buddy..."

As the music continued on the actor began to walk less with child-like wonder and more like an experienced man. The First was growing wiser as his time progressed.
Jesse watched as the player eventually came to a stop, looking sadly around before heavily sighing.

"Steve?"

"He's lonely," Steve said softly.

Notch entered the stage once more, placing an encouraging hand on his creation's shoulder.

"He's going to make mortals now isn't he?"

"Yep."

More actors clamored onto the stage, all dressed like villagers. The First looked thrilled to see them, immediately setting out to teach his new friends everything he had learned so far in life. The group departed happily off stage and the narrator finished his story and Steve stopped translating.

The audience cheered.

Jesse was grinning, he leaned back in his seat, the stone cool on his back, "That was good."

"Even though you didn't understand the language?"

"Yeah!"

"Of course," Steve chuckled, "Let's wait a minute for the crowds to thin down; I don't want to climb over people."

Jesse looked around, watching as actors reset the stage and people began to leave, "I have a question."

"Yeah?"

"Did they ever do another play on another part of the First's life?"

"Such as?"

Jesse shrugged, "I dunno um..." he glanced at Steve, "Did he ever have kids?"

The adult's eyebrows shot up, "Not in any history book that I'm aware off."

"Well, he could I dunno," Jesse blushed a little, "He could have probably got around?"

Steve burst into laughter.

Jesse smiled awkwardly, then deciding to go for the question eating at his mind -"Did you have any kids?"

Steve stopped laughing and stared, a little surprised.

Jesse immediately regretted his statement, "I'm sorry, I just heard you guys in the kitchen-"

"In the kitchen? Earlier tonight?" he asked.

"Yeah, Alex mentioned something about a house full of laughter," he mumbled out, "I didn't catch it all, I'm sorry, I thought you guys might have had a..." he trailed off.

Steve finally spoke after a long tedious moment of silence. "We did once,"
Jesse's eyes went wide, he was stunned. "What?"

Steve looked off, "Alex doesn't like to talk about it - it hurts her too much. But..." he sighed, closing his eyes, as if trying to push away the memory, "We had a child once. I guess you can say it's one of my 'What ifs'. But um, we lost..." he trailed off.

Jesse covered his mouth, "I'm sorry, I never should have-"

Steve reached across, "It's not your fault," He rested his hand on Jesse's shoulder, "It's painful but...we take that pain, and we help people with it. We meet people who are on the verge of losing everything, and we help them save what we ourselves couldn't..."

"I'm so sorry,"

"It's okay, it was a really long time ago," Steve smiled softly, "But I'd like to think, my child would have ended up a lot like someone such as you and that gives me peace."

Jesse smiled sadly, "If it's anything, I lost my parents when I was little. I don't even remember them. According to the people who dropped me at the orphanage, they were killed. But I'd like to think they would have been as cool as you."

"Well," Steve bumped heads with him, "Don't we just click together."

Jesse nodded, leaning into the gesture.

After a moment, Steve retreated and stood. "Well, we better go, the arena is pretty empty and I think I hear roaring at the races. Pretty sure Alex is kicking everyone's ass."

They didn't catch the rest of their party at the races but instead bumped into them just outside of Bach's blacksmith shop.

"Did you win?" Steve asked, bringing up nothing of his and Jesse's discussion.

"Don't I always?" Alex grinned cheekily.

"No?"

She jabbed her husband.

Steve backed away laughing, "Hey!"

"You should have seen her Jesse!" Petra exclaimed, "Alex and Gaea hauled! Even though Gaea was the biggest horse there on the track and should have been slower she went through the obstacles way better than the others! Where were you, it was amazing!"

"I got separated and missed the first showing," Jesse said, "Steve eventually found me and we caught the next one."

"Did Kasumi talk with you?" Alex asked her husband.

"Yeah, remind me to compliment her sewing skills, loved the creeper costume-"

"Steve! Alex!" Bach called from the far side of his shop, by the tavern, "Come here and show these pansies how to drink like men!"
"Is he talking you or me?" Alex asked Steve.

"You obviously. He can waste me, you know that," Steve said.

"C-mere!"

"I think he's wasted already hun."

"Steve! Alex!"

"We're coming!" Steve called, he looked to the trio, and "This will only take a sec to talk him down. You guys can hang here, or go check things out, we'll find you either way."

"Think we'll sit for a moment and watch the dances," Petra said.

"STEVE!"

"Coming! Good Notch Bach!" Steve smiled at them, "Be right back."

Lukas smiled at Jesse as Alex and Steve headed for the tavern, "Did Steve have to translate for you? Alex had to for us," he sat down on a nearby stone bench.

Jesse and Petra joined him, "Yeah, we did. What did you guys think of it?"

"Funny," Petra stated simply.

"Fasinating," Lukas waved his journal, "I got a lot of stuff so far!"

Jesse had hardly settled down on the bench when a young girl his age raced up. She was blonde, curvy and very lovely. Her long hair went down to her waist a flower crown atop her head that matched her red dress. "Saltare cum me!"

Jesse was stunned, "What?"

The young woman tugged excitedly on Jesse's arm, speaking rapidly in her native tongue, "Saltare cum me?"

Jesse laughed awkwardly from his seat, looking towards Petra or Lukas for assistance, "I'm sorry I don't understand."

"Saltare cume me!" she repeated happily for the third time.

"Guys?"

Petra looked at Lukas; Jesse could tell by the look on her face she personally found Jesse's situation hilarious, "Have at her Lukas."

Lukas leaned forward on the bench, "We don't understand you. Do you speak English?"

The female didn't seem to acknowledge the question. "Scio! Quamquam tu es bella! Saltare cum me!" the lady gestured to the square where multiple pairs of young adults were gathering around the maypole, prepared to dance.

Petra leaned in, whispering in Jesse's ear, "I think she is asking you to dance."

Jesse blushed a little, "Dance with you? Is that what you want?"
She grinned brightly, "Dance! Placet fac!"

"Um, I don't know - how, I have two left feet, and - guys help!"

"Dance with her Jesse," Petra teased.

"Alex!" Lukas called to the tavern.

The female heard them and broke away from the drinking rabble, where Bach had pulled Steve into a drunk arm wrestle, "Yes?"

"This young lady wants to dance with Jesse. We're trying to tell her he can't, but we can't understand her very well. We're having communication problems.

Alex glanced at the female, then towards the square, "Yeah, you are definitely gonna want to pass on that one sweet heart."

"I'm trying," Jesse stressed, "But, why do you think I should?"

"That out there... is a courting dance."

"C-courting?!"

"Yeah! Future life mate, marriage, that sort of thing." she explained.

Jessed turned scarlet and Petra burst into laughter.

"He can't," Lukas tried to tell the blonde girl once more through giggles of his own.

"Non intelligitis?"

"Ah," Alex clicked her tongue, "She only speaks the old tongue, her family are traditionalists. Hang on." she reached across, gently taking hold of the girl's hand that held Jesse's to get her attention.

Alex pointed at Jesse, "Capta est."

The girl looked a little hurt, "Capta est?" Matrimonium? She pointed at Petra sitting next to Jesse, "Matrimonium?" she repeated.

"Well," Alex said slowly, she seemed to hesitate, as if she wasn't sure how to answer.

The female didn't catch the hesitation and instead raised an eyebrow. She slowly pointed to Lukas on the other side of Jesse, "...Matrimonium?"

Alex paused again, but this time a funny expression crossed her face. Her eyebrows shot up and the curves of her mouth wiggled, threatening to smile. She looked like she might laugh, "Ita," she finally said.

"Oh!" the youth looked surprised, but she recovered. She smiled politely at Jesse and then proceeded to kiss both sides of his cheeks. "Beatitudinem et beneficia semper!" She stated happily, before running back into the crowds.

Jesse rubbed one of his cheeks and Alex snorted into her hand, "What did you tell her?"

"Um," Alex sat down on the bench, "I said you were taken and uh-"
"Why did she end up pointing at Petra, then me?" Lukas asked.

"She asked if he was married. She thought it was Petra, but before I could come up with an excuse she thought it was you Lukas ..." Alex blushed, "I said yes, and she then gave you many blessings and a hope of a happy marriage."

Petra who had barely recovered from the courting statement earlier, doubled back over. Lukas turned scarlet, all the way up to his ears. He buried his face into his hands, "Oh sweet Notch!"

"Why did she end up pointing at Petra, then me?" Lukas asked.

"She asked if he was married. She thought it was Petra, but before I could come up with an excuse she thought it was you Lukas ..." Alex blushed, "I said yes, and she then gave you many blessings and a hope of a happy marriage."

Petra who had barely recovered from the courting statement earlier, doubled back over. Lukas turned scarlet, all the way up to his ears. He buried his face into his hands, "Oh sweet Notch!"

"A-Alex! Jesse sputtered out, his own face flooding with an intense heat, "Oh Notch why?!"

The adult shrugged meekly, "Sorry hun! She didn't give me much time to explain. She just assumed so I rolled with it."

Steve rejoined the group then, just a little flush in the cheeks. "What did I miss?"

Petra was still laughing, but she managed to get some words out, "Lukas...and - oh boy...Pfft! Lukas and Jesse are married now!"

Steve mimicked hurt, "And I wasn't invited?! I thought we were close!"

"We eloped." Jesse said an impish grin on his lips as he tried to roll with it, "He just couldn't wait to-Ow!"

Lukas elbowed him, "Stop it! You're making it worse!"

Jesse laughed elbowing him gently back.

Alex had Lukas covered though. She pointed to a dance past the maypole where a group of tightly knit pairs spun gracefully around, "I think that's the married couples dance over ther. That's the one you should be in. But Lukas is going to have to lead Jesse, because I'm afraid you're too short."

Petra burst into laughter, again, clutching her sides. Even Lukas had to laugh as Jesse blushed horribly.

"Height has nothing to do with it," he stammered out, "Besides," he got up walking to Steve and grabbing hold of the man's arm, "If anyone should be dancing the married dance it should be you two!"

Petra and Lukas cheered in agreement.
"Woah there kiddo!" Steve tried to free his arm, "You do not want to see that awkward display let me tell you."

"No I really think I do," Jesse teased.

"Nooooo, I think you -"

"Come on honey," Alex smiled sticking out her hand, "Dance with me?"

Steve stared at his wife's wiggling fingers, then he smiled at her, eyes glittering, "Like I can say no to you," he took her hand and pulled her up, "Especially since it's been awhile."

"Just don't drop me," Alex whispered.

Jesse grabbed Petra and Lukas pulling them up, "We are not missing this guys!" he said as they took off after the couple.

The trio ran around the courting dance, all the dancers preparing to begin. The girl from earlier spotted Jesse and waved. Jesse waved back, albeit a difficult motion since he was still hand locked with his friends.

The female giggled, elbowing one of her friends, she pointed at the group, "Matrimonium!" she shouted in delight.

The entire dance troupe looked over, "Matrimonium!" they cheered, some winking brazenly, others clapping in encouragement, "Matrimonium!" they cheered again.

Petra laughed, and Lukas smiled. Jesse just shook his head and tried not to blush, giving them both a squeeze with his hand as they headed towards the married couples dance.

They sat down on a nearby bench, "Does anyone see them?" Lukas asked.

Petra found them first, "There," she pointed.

Most of the older couples had stepped out, joining the musicians in song with a clap of their hands. Some of them were even singing, varying between old tongue and English. The band had picked up the pace playing new song:

One day I looked up, and there you were.

Like a simple question, looking for an answer.

The husband and wife were in the center of the pack of people, starting out slow as they waited for chorus

I think I know why the dog howls at the moon,

The younger couples, Steve and Alex included, began an intricate set of twists and turns under each other's arms.

I sing dela, dela nganya dela when I'm with you,

Dela, sondela mama sondela, I burn for you.
I've been waiting for you all my life hoping for a miracle,
I've been waiting day and night, day and night.

I've been waiting for you all my life waiting for redemption,
I've been waiting day and night, I burn for you.

"Rusty my ass," Lukas laughed, "Look how good they are." he cheered as Steve and Alex twirled past their bench.

Jesse nodded, finding himself humming and clapping along as the song progressed. Various couples were all taking turns doing a special move, each a different level of skill. Some simply dabbed into the corner of their arms, others did elegant twists and dips in each other's embrace.

"Do you think Steve and Alex will do anything?" Petra asked.
Jesse shrugged, "Maybe he'll-"

"Throw her Steve!" someone from the crowd yelled.
Cheers erupted, "Yeah throw Alex! Catch her!"

"Maybe he'll do that," Jesse laughed.

Alex even though she was laughing, was shaking her head, going: No, no, no throwing!
Steve was nodding his head, grinning as he wiggle his eyebrows, Yes, yes, let's do it!

I sing dela, dela ngyanya dela when I'm with you,

Dela, sondela mama sondela, I burn for you.

Steve spun Alex once under his arm. Then hoisting her up by the waist, Steve threw her high up. Jesse watched as Alex spun three times gracefully in the air before landing back down into her husband's open arms. The audience cheered and laughed as Steve made a fake face of pain, grabbing his lower back. The laughter intensified as Alex playfully slapped his arm.

Jesse and his friends cheered, clapping as the song came to an end.

Steve spotted them, face a little flushed and lungs a little strained. He leaned down whispering something at Alex, whose eyes lit up and she nodded vigorously. They both smiled at the trio.

"They're up to something," Petra said.

"No really?" Lukas laughed.

Steve walked over to the singer, speaking into his ear. The man grinned broadly and nodded, passing on whatever message it was to his musicians. Then a single flute player started the tune-

There was a wave of cheers and throngs of people stood swarming onto the open market. Whatever was about to play next, it was a popular song.

The singer began to sing:

A single thread in a tapestry
Though its color brightly shines
Can never see its purpose

In the pattern of the grand design...

"Guys, " Lukas said, "I don't see Steve or Alex."

That's because the adults were sneaking up right in by them.

Steve reached out, "Your turn to dance!"

"Wait we're not married though!" Lukas said.

"No problem!" Alex grabbed his hand, "It's a group dance."

And the stone that sits up on the very top,
Of the mountain's mighty face,

Does it think that it's more important?

Than the stones that forms the base~

Petra shoved the boys forward, laughing, "Come on you chickens, go dance!"

Jesse yelped as he stumbled up, unable to resist Petra's push and Steve's pull. "Lukas grab her!" he cried.

He and Lukas together managed to reach back and grab the female by either hand. Petra crying out in surprise as they pulled her up.

"Group means everyone Petra!" Lukas laughed.

So how can you see what your life is worth?

Or where your value lies!

Ohhhh, you can never see through the eyes of man,

You must look at your life,

Look at your life through heaven's eyes!

"We don't know the moves!" Jesse said.

"There are none!" Steve laughed as he spun Jesse and Alex under his arms, "You just dance!" Then he had Alex and was waltzing off.

"We just dance?" Jesse asked.

"We just dance," Petra confirmed.

"Well then," Jesse took Lukas with his free hand, spinning his friends under his arms, "Dancing it is then!"

"I'm glad we did this guys," Lukas said, "We really need this, I don't know about you, but I'm
having a blast."

"This place is amazing," Petra agreed, "I can't wait for tomorrow night to do it again!"

Jesse smiled as they lowered themselves to the ground then jumped up with the rest of the crowd cheering in delight. He stared at his friends, laughing and cheering as they danced... "Hey um guys?"

"Yeah?"

"I want to thank you,"

Petra and Lukas tilted their heads, "For what?" the former asked.

"For being patient," Jesse paused as he and Lukas went around Petra, before grabbing hands once again, "I haven't been exactly a good friend lately."

"Jesse don't be like that, you are an amazing friend," Lukas encouraged.

"Yeah, you're awesome dude," Petra agreed.

"Well, I - It's been hard lately, and I'll be honest," Jesse explained, "I was ready to give up in ever trying to get home."

They looked at each other, and then back at him.

"But I'm good now, and I'm ready to take on anything with you guys." he smiled, "I just want to thank you for having my back."

Petra smiled, "No problem Jesse."

"No problem at all." Lukas added.

Jesse smiled, "Cool."

"Cool Beans," they both said.

"Coolio!"

They laughed.

"Partner swap!" Someone yelled, and there was more cheering. Suddenly Jesse was pulled from his friends and dancing with a stranger.

"Guess we're moving!" Petra laughed as she swayed off with a woman.

"See you guys!" Lukas cheered as he was pulled along with a small child.

Jesse cracked up, happily accepting the hands of his new partner. Swap after swap it continued, at one point he was even dancing with his former admirer from the courting group. The girl giggled, blowing a kiss before twirling off in a whirl of flowers and golden hair to a new partner.

"Oh hey Kiddo!" Steve grinned as Jesse became his new partner.

"Hey!" Jesse beamed.

"Having fun?" he asked, playfully hoisting him up.
"Yeah!" Jesse smiled, "This is the most fun I've had in a long time, excluding the laser squids."

"Really? the older male laughed, "The squids?"

"Yeah, the squids."

The adults eyes sparkled, then, "Jesse?"

"Yeah?"

"I was thinking about our conversation."

Jesse felt his smiled drop, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to remind you of your child I just-"

"No not that, the other one." Steve pushed some sweat plastered hair out of his eyes, "I mean the one back in the Hallway."

"Oh...What about it?"

"Well I was thinking, after we find your door, and we will find it. I was thinking..." Steve shrugged, "You can always come back?"

Jesse's eyebrows shot up, "Do you mean-"

"Well, Olivia and Axel will know where you are, and if you really want to live here there is no stopping you once you find home. Heck it doesn't have to be a permanent home; it could be a vacation villa or something." Steve shrugged again, not quite looking Jesse directly in the eye, "I mean, Alex and I would love to have you around for visits. I think there is a really nice oak tree not far from my house. Do you like tree houses?"

Jesse was staring. "Do you mean that? I can stay here?"

Steve looked at him, "Of course, after you find your home and friends...You're an amazing person Jesse. Honestly I would miss you. Course," he coughed, "You don't have to-"

"Yes!" Jesse smiled eyes shining; he nodded vigorously, "Yes! I can bring Axel and Olivia here when I visit, and they can meet you and- Yes!"

Steve smiled, "Guess we better get looking then! Oh wait-" he laughed, "We've been doing that haven't we?"

Jesse could have hugged him then. But Alex swooped in, taking Jesse into her arms, "My turn!" she cried, passing Petra on over to Steve. Jesse laughed and spun her around, finding himself the happiest he had been in a long time.

So how do you judge what a man is worth?

By what he builds or buys?

You can never see with your eyes on earth,

Look through heaven's eyes~

Just look at your life, look at your life!

Look at your life through heaven's eyes~!
Steve, Lukas and Petra eventually joined them and Jesse realized he now looked towards the future with a bright new outlook. Finally feeling as if things were going to be okay.

The group of five danced on into the night, dancing around the bonfires and through the fireworks. The fireworks exploding into a myriad of colors, sparkling like the stars above. They went on and on, reflecting the happiness and joy radiating from the village below.

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer:
Art by LunaDestiny
Dela belongs to Johnny Clegg
Heaven's Eyes belongs to Dreamworks
The First has created a door, a magical exit of sorts. It is supposed to lead to other worlds, to other creations.

I wonder why he leaves; I know there was a great tragedy here many ages ago in our world, but no one in the village really knows what happened. Is that why the First is leaving us?

Many begged him not to go, afraid he disapproved of how they treated him. He does not wish to be revered as a God, and even though many try to accept his wishes, there is still reverence to him.

It wasn't us, He says he'll be back, for this place is his home and always shall be. But he is eager to explore, to seek new and wonderous lands.

"Leave the door unlocked," he told me.

Although I am happy for him- for this is the most youthful he has seemed in a long time- I still worry.

For do not doors work both ways?

Our First may leave, but I fear that something else may come in.

(In the corner there is a hastily written note, clearly not by the original author:

No no! Not come in, come back, something came back!)

Despite having been up way later than he had been in a very long time, Jesse still woke up really early.

And he didn't care.

They had gotten back to the house very early in the morning, tired, happy, and maybe a little sore from excessive dancing. Jesse glanced at the clock and determined that he had only slept a few hours at best, not even long enough to really sleep deep, nor dream. But he was still riding an adrenaline high of happiness, not the least bit tired.

Thunder rumbled softly outside. There might be a storm coming. He hoped it wouldn't ruin night two of the festival.

It was still pretty dim outside, the sun not yet peeking up over the horizon. Jesse slid out of bed, feeling the urge to go for a walk. He slipped on his clothes, pausing briefly as Petra rolled over in her bed, mumbling something in her sleep.

His friends were out cold, thoroughly winded from the night's excursions. Jesse smiled, happy that his relationship with them was back on the mending. He made a mental note to visit Ground Town soon, so he could give Ivor and Aiden his thanks as well.

Jesse slipped on the rest of his clothes, and then his shoes - he didn't bother to grab his armor- and trotted down the stairs. No one was up, not even Steve and Alex. He grabbed his coat - one that Alex had purchased for him- and stepped outside.
It was chilly for the late autumn morning; you could feel the bite of the incoming winter air. Mariah had mentioned it would probably come early this year, judging by the cold.

Jesse set off down the path, admiring the last of the autumn leaves still clinging from the trees. The wind would pick up now and then, taking a few of the stubborn ones with them. Jesse caught an oak leaf as it flittered down, rubbing the scarlet plant between his thumbs before letting the wind reclaim it.

He recalled Steve talking about a tree house home, the thought of it making him smile. But since there were seasons in this world Jesse concluded he might want to consider a pine tree instead of an oak. Maybe he'd just live on the ground, which would be fun to, anywhere here would be amazing actually.

He could live here; Steve and Alex wanted him here, the fact that he could make this home just...

It was quiet, the spawns here apparently liked to hibernate for winter. That was another feature Jesse found fairly pleasing. Sure they didn't always disappear upon death, and they were numerous and more aggressive, but he liked the thought of them going away for a few months.

He passed the watering hole, ice was already freezing over the calm waters- Ice skating Olivia loved ice skating, the small lake would be perfect for it.

Mt. Incendia rumbled in the distance, temporarily breaking the serenity. A fresh wave of smoke billowed from the mouth, and the ground just barely shook. Jesse paused from his walking.

Alex had said it wouldn't blow...

His mind wandered to his dream, thinking about the devastation and chaos that lay within those mountainous caverns. Did the First ever go back there?

Jesse wondered where the Immortal was right now. If he stayed here would he eventually meet him?

"Good morning Jesse,"

Jesse yelped turning around to see Brine. The elder was resting on a stone bench, a heavy fur coat billowing over his frail form.

"Oh," Jesse uneasily pushed hair out of his face, "Brine, I didn't see you there."

"I just waddled up while you were admiring the mountain." the old man answered.

"Yeah, well," he looked at the smoking behemoth, "I'm more amazed that the village lives right at the base of it. They're pretty brave to do that. Were you um, at the festival last night?"

Brine nodded, "For a little while yes, but these old legs don't dance like they used to. I was actually looking for you."

Jesse walked over to the bench, "Really? I didn't see you there."

"Eh, few thousand people, easy to blend in. But no matter, I wanted to show you this," he held out a book."

Jesse looked at it, "Did you find a breakthrough in your search?"

"More than just a breakthrough," the other grinned, "I found the Gate."
Jesse's eyebrows shot up, "You what?!"

"It is a jungle ruin not far from where we are now, roughly a four hour hike. Maybe longer, since I will be coming,"

Jesse took the book, thumbing through the pages even though he couldn't read them, "You found it?! You actually found the Immortal's Gate?"

"No, I found a garden gate," the old man laughed, "Of course, did I not tell you I would find the Portal? We can go today if we leave early."

"Today?" Jesse faltered, "I- um,"

"Oh you don't have to go through it!" Brine said, "But we do need to make sure it intact and still working. Don't worry; we'll be up there and back before the festival even starts again tonight."

"Are you sure we can't just wait two more days?"

Brine sighed, "I'm afraid not, there is a snowstorm coming, it will be here soon. Traversing the jungle is much harder than normal when there is a blizzard on top of you. Our world is different from yours; the weather isn't isolated to certain areas. If we don't hurry, you'll be stuck searching the hard way during winter."

"I-"

"Don't you want to get home Jesse?"

Jesse cringed a little, conflicted. This was so sudden, having the possibility of home right in front of him, and yet...He thought about what Steve said, the sooner he got home the sooner he could stay here. He could talk to Steve about the Gate...

"Talk to your friends," the old man patted Jesse on the shoulder, even through his fur lined coat the man's hands were cold. "I'll be on other side of the village on the bridge till noon. If you don't come I'll understand that you are not ready." he gently took the book back, "Talk to your friends."

Jesse looked back over his shoulder to the direction of Steve's house, "I'll talk to them-" he looked back.

Brine was gone.

Jesse hurried into the house, "Steve!" he whispered softly, shedding his coat at the door. "Steve I need to talk to you!"

Steve was a local, he knew about the Gate. He would understand Jesse's need to use it, right? Maybe he could even help him and the others up there. "Steve-" he stopped in the kitchen.

There was note on the dinner table, he hadn't noticed it before. Jesse picked it up, reading the sturdy hand writing.

_Kiddos,_

_Alex and I have some business to do outside of town today. You and your friends can hit a second run into town or just hang here. Or do whatever it is that pleases you most at the moment._

_We probably won't be back till very late this afternoon, but I promise we'll get back to dancing_
tonight. Assuming we can still stand. I don't know about you but my feet are killing me. Maybe we'll just relax here at home. Who knows?

We'll see you soon, have fun.

Yours Truly, Steve and Alex

(p.s. From Alex, I made some waffle mix, it's in the fridge all you have to do is cook it! Love you kiddos!)

There was a little heart next to the love.

Jesse set the letter down on the table, feeling a heavy weight even though it was only paper. "Great..."

"Jesse?"

He looked up to see a disheveled Lukas coming down the stairs. He still had sleep in his eyes, his nightshirt was twisted, and his hair was floofing all over the place. Petra was right behind him, her hair messy enough to rival a gorgon. A red smear was on her cheek where a little girl had painted a heart the night prior. Her eyes were barely open as she dragged herself to the bottom of the stairs.

"Jesse?" Lukas repeated.

Jesse pushed the letter aside, "Sorry did I wake you guys?"

"You whisper loudly," Petra mumbled.

Lukas spotted the paper, "What's that?"

"It's a letter from Steve and Alex," Jesse explained, "They're going to be out of town till late afternoon."

"Then why do you look so bummed out about that?"

"I wanted to talk to them about getting their help."

"For what?"

"Guys, Brine found the Gate,"

Suddenly both Petra and Lukas were wide awake, running into the kitchen."What?" the female asked. "Are you serious?! Where?"

"The Immortal's Gate is in an old jungle ruin about three to four hours from here."

"And you wanted to talk to Steve and Alex about this?" Lukas asked.

"Well, yeah," Jesse shrugged, "This is something native to their world, but Brine says we can't wait."

Lukas crossed his arms, "And why is that?"

"There is a snowstorm coming, once it gets here we won't be able to access the jungle."

Petra rubbed the back of her neck, "Three to four hours?"

"Yeah..."
"We'll be back later than them then. If we come back,"

"We just need to make sure it's there, make sure it works. Then we can ask Steve and Alex if we can use it," Jesse pressed. "I...I want them to know about this."

"We can leave a note," Lukas suggested, "Telling them that we found the Gate and we'll be back."

"We can't risk a snowstorm ruining our chances," Petra agreed.

Jesse looked down at the paper, "Yeah..."

Jesse stared up at the temple before him. It was multiple stories high, stacked atop layer by layer almost like a pyramid, each section more narrow than the next. It was composed entirely out of stone. Some floors - namely the higher ones - were almost all open, only held up by pillars, while the rest were more solid with narrow glassless windows. The majority of the structure now claimed by the jungle vines. But the towers still spire high above the jungle canopy, a silent stone behemoth.

The Immortal's Temple.

"This is it," Brine said eagerly.

Progress hadn't been as slow as predicted, Brine moved pretty fast for an old man. This wasn't surprising since he was really good at reappearing and disappearing quickly.

The older male stumbled a little, right at the edge of the temple steps. "Op!"

Jesse quickly kneeled down, "Are you alright?"

"Fine fine, just help me in child. My heart can't take the excitement,"

Jesse pulled him up, trying to ignore the ice cold fingers and guided him inside. "We wouldn't want that."

"Truly, who else can harness the Gate," the other laughed rasping, "And we can't go waiting on the Immortal now can we?"

Jesse just slightly smiled, as best as was polite and released his hand.

Lukas and Petra were already inside the first floor. Lukas was trying to make out some art on the wall, but most of it was faded and worn beyond repair.

"This was made post The Purging of Mt. Incendia. It's thousands of years old," Brine explained.

"Are you sure it's stable," Petra observed, stepping to the side as some small loose stones fell from the ceiling.

"Oh very," Brine assured, "The First prided himself in making his creations sturdy. He didn't have time for maintenance, so he built them to last."

"Where is the door?" Jesse asked.

Brine flipped through his notes, "On the floor third from the top, of the highest spire." He pointed down a hallway, "That way."

As they ascended the stairs through each floor, Jesse noticed Lukas and Petra were oddly quite.
Neither was chattering away about the potential of finally getting home. In fact they almost walked slowly, absentmindedly, taking time to look at random things in the temple.

"Hey Brine,"

The old man looked at Jesse, "Yes?"

"You keep going we'll catch up," Jesse said, loud enough for Petra and Lukas to hear, "I just need to make sure we're all on the same game page."

The elder didn't seemed surprised by his hesitance. "Very well, see you at the top." then he waddled on.

Lukas and Petra glanced at each other, then followed after Jesse as he stepped out of the hallway and into a room with an open view.

"What's up man?" the female asked.

Jesse turned to face them, "Are you guys alright?"

Neither answered.

"So I'm not the only one bothered by this?" Jesse confirmed.

Lukas rubbed his arm, fiddling with his armor strap, "I feel like we're breaking the law for some reason, like being here is trespassing."

"I agree," Petra said, "I know this place is important to the locals, I just have to keep telling myself that if it was strictly off limits then Brine wouldn't be show us it."

"We're just going to see if it works...right?" Lukas asked.

Jesse sighed and nodded, "Then we're going back and telling Steve and Alex we found the Gate."

Petra looked around, "You think this place would have been booby trapped anyway if they didn't want people here. But I've seen nothing, I haven't even heard anything."

The jungle was eerily quiet, for a jungle anyway. The only sound was the wind and the rumble of dark clouds moving in.

"Storms coming," Lukas observed. He looked back to the group, "Honestly, this wasn't how I planned on finding home. I just always assumed we'd just...find the door." he scoffed, "And here we are, with the easiest possible way to get back to our world, and I'm hesitating."

Jesse sighed again, running his fingers through his hair. "You're not the only one, trust me."

"Let's just get the damn thing lit yeah?" Petra said.

They headed back to the stairs, finding Brine already up on the floor third from the top. It was a large circular room, with another exit on the far end. There was a large ring of decorated stone. One side had a intricate circle covered in strange markings. On the other side, was a simple obsidian frame.

Jesse felt his breath cut short.

"There it is...the door to every world. The path to all of Notch's creations. We found it," Brine said, "We found the Immortal's Gate."
Petra and Lukas both looked at Jesse, tense.

Jesse swallowed, once, twice, "Well...let's see if it works."

"Yes!" Brine clapped his hands together, then pointed, "That right over there opposite end of the door is the harnessing circle, that is where you summon the old magic"

"So what can we do?" Lukas asked.

"Use your flint to light the portal and I'll work wonders on my end." the old man was already moving towards the ring.

Petra looked at Jesse, she extended her hand, "I can do it if you want?"

Jesse silently pulled out the flint and steel and handed it over to the ginger. She gave him an encouraging smile, and walked towards the portal. Lukas lingered giving Jesse a tilt of his head, "You going to be okay?"

"Just give me a minute?" he asked. "I'll be right with you guys. I mean...it's not like we're going through."

Thankfully Lukas nodded, and left to join Petra.

Jesse stepped away from the circular room, retreating to an open balcony to the right of the Immortal's Gate.

Outside the wind was picking up, the sky was considerably darker too. It vaguely reminded him of his first day here. Above the jungle canopy and even beyond its edge into rolling fields the clouds swirled, dark grey and angry. Thunder boomed and lightning flashed within the grey folds of the sky. Some even shot down, hitting Mt. Incendia that looked no farther away than before.

Had they really walked four hours? It didn't feel like they had gone that far. He looked over his shoulder, the Adamans still behind him. He looked forward again, able to see the village festival lights in the dim light, resting at the base of the volcano.

They weren't that far at all...

The wind picked up for a second and Jesse rubbed his armored arms, wishing he had brought a coat to wear over his armor.

A storm was coming to the First World.

"Vast isn't it?"

Jesse jumped, not realizing the older man had snuck up behind him. Again. He pulled his gaze away from the scenery and looked at Brine, frowning, "That's one word for it."

Brine adjusted on his walking cane, "Of course," he waved his hand at the view as if to shoo it away, maybe even shun it. "I'm sure you've seen much more spectacular worlds than this old one."

"I think it's my favorite actually," Jesse answered testily, "I think it looks fine."

"Really?" he seemed surprised, "A bit outdated at least."

Jesse's frown deepened, but the other spoke up again before he could get another phrase in.
"You seem lost in thought?"

Jesse looked away, fighting down that growing sensation of unease, "A lot on my mind I suppose."

"Worried about what Steve and Alex might think if they knew you were here? They were out of town weren't they?"

His heart skipped a beat, how did Brine- "We left them a note, they know where we're going."

"But you didn't physically tell them?"

"Are you done prepping your old magic?" he asked instead, feeling an unnatural wave of irritation. "I thought it was difficult to summon?"

"Only if you're not old."

"Then what are we waiting for then?"

"Oh? Just waiting to confirm a few things."

Thunder boomed, deafeningly loud. Jesse looked up, startled to see that the storm had already reached them. Brine looked up at the sky as well, almost like he was irritated by the weather. He mumbled something in the old tongue, and then repeated aloud, "I have everything ready, but like I said, I need a few more things." And the old man slowly walked back into the sheltered safety of the ruins.

Jesse looked back out onto the terrain. The forest was alive with movement. The wind howled and the trees thrashed about in the harsh gale. A particular gust shoved him forward, towards the edge of the broken balcony. He looked over the ruins as far as he dared, eyeing the trees at the base of the temple ruin.

The winds shoved again and Jesse took a step back from the fifty foot drop.

The storm wailed, "Go! Go!" the wind seemed to cry.

Even Mother Nature itself was adding to his unease.

"You're doing it wrong!"

"Fine! You do it,"

Jesse turned around to see Lukas hand Petra the enchanted flint. The male looked irritated. "You've tried like twenty times already. I don't see why this is a problem. Jesse never has issues, it's not like it takes a special trick."

"You're just not aiming it at the Portal right," Petra huffed.

Lukas gestured to the Immortal's Gate, still unlit, "By all mean then."

The female hit the flint and the portal sparked, lighting up in a glorious blue hue. Petra grinned, "See? Not aiming it-

The Immortal's Gate snuffed out, just as empty as before.

"You did it wrong," Lukas grinned.
Petra flushed, "Shut up man!" she hit the flint, twice, thrice, "Oh come on!"

The portal remained stubbornly dark.

"You guys okay?" Jesse asked, retreating from the balcony and into the shelter of the building. The thunder roared loudly above, but he ignored it.

"As you can see," Lukas explained, "The Gate won't light."

"And don't you dare say we're doing it wrong," Petra warned, "We can get it to turn on, it just won't stay on. I know there is no trick to this, we've seen you do it a thousand times!"

"Are you close enough?" Jesse suggested helpfully.

Petra frowned, and stuck her arm right into the center of the frame and hit the flint.

"Petra!"

But the gate still remained closed.

"You could have lost your arm!" Jesse stressed.

'Sorry, it's just so damn irritating. Why won't it light?'

"Maybe it is broken," Lukas said softly. "We should just leave before the storm-

"I'm ready on my end!" Brine called from the magical circle, it was glowing now. "Are we having trouble?"

Jesse stuck out his hand, "Here just let me give it a shot guys," he whispered.

"If you make it work, I swear..." Petra mumbled as she passed the enchanted tool over.

Jesse leaned close to the magic portal, and hit the flint-

Thunder roared, the ruins themselves shook!

With a loud bang and a whoosh of air the Immortal's Gate lit up in a vibrant diamond blue. Jesse yelped and fire poured from the sides, sending him and the others scrambling back. The heat singed the skin of his extended arm, regardless of the armor protecting him.

He and the others stumbled back, and Jesse fell to his knees, suddenly feeling drained.

Lukas dropped down next to him, "Jesse?!!"

"I-I'm fine."

"Holy crap," Petra put a hand on the Jesse's shoulder, gaping, "Guys, look!" she pointed.

Jesse followed her pointing finger back to the portal. Inside the blue glow of the Gate, Jesse could actually see what lay on the other side of the magical door. There was a dessert, and a large sandstone temple in the distance-

The door shifted, and Jesse saw ocean. Then he saw a castle, floating high above in the clouds Castles.
Cities.

Oceans.

Moons.

It all flashed by, one after the other.

The Immortal's Gate...Portal to a thousand worlds...It worked.

Jesse stared at it, and despite the good news before him, he couldn't shake his unease.

"It works," Lukas gasped. "It-it actually works. We can go home, we tell Steve and Alex and-

and..."

Lightning cracked down right outside the temple.

"Shit!" Petra cursed, struggling to stay standing as the entire foundation shook, "What the hell is

wrong with the weather?!

"You don't think it has anything to do with lighting the door do you?" Lukas asked, paling slightly.

Jesse stood, "Let's just go, we know it works. We'll come back when it's safer."

Petra turned, "Brine we're-" she froze.

Jesse turned to see Brine standing in the middle of his circle, the stones no longer glowing. Brine was

laughing. He stepped out of the magical ring, grinning broadly.

Jesse's stomach twisted at that smile. "What is so funny?" he demanded.

The old man smiled, "The weather has nothing to do with the door," then he shrugged, "Well,
maybe a little."

The wind wailed! Lighting shot down through a gap in the ceiling, striking the floor next to Brine.

Jesse and the others cried out in alarm and shielded their eyes as the room went blinding white.

Jesse's heart was in overdrive, his flight instincts were screaming. Something was wrong very very

wrong!

They looked up, Brine was still standing there when the light receded. He was unfazed as he looked

up at the sky, "Missed," he said dryly, then he started laughing, and flipped back his hood.

Petra screamed, and Lukas actually took a step back. Jesse stared in horror as the old man's face

rapidly began to rot, like death.

His entire body was doing it, rotting, melting away, turning to dust and scattering to the winds, till

there was nothing but bone and all the while Brine kept laughing. But soon the bones straightened,

and muscle and flesh slowly formed over the new human frame.
Jesse stared in terror as a new body and a new face stood before them. His skin was darker, tanner, he was thicker too. There were...there were burns, on his skin, patches all over. And his eyes-

'Brine' stretched, "Oh," he adjusted the tattered clothing on him, now much too small, "Oh, have you any idea how long I've had to sit in that rotting corpse?" he cracked a neck joint, opening his eyes as he looked at Jesse.

Oh gods his eyes.

Petra gasped, covering her mouth, her hands were shaking.

Jesse's breath hitched.

There were no irises, only white. White eyes.

"What's going on?!!" Lukas was pale.

Petra was shaking her head, "The phantom," she said, her voice muffled.

The new Brine looked directly at Jesse, "You have no idea, how long I've waited for this."

"Jesse what do we do?" Petra asked, taking a step back.

'Brine' rolled his shoulders, "Now, back to work yeah?"

"Guys?! What's the plan?!!" Lukas was frantic.

Jesse was frozen, his heart pounding. It was his dream, it was the brother. But he was dead, he couldn't be here! He couldn't be here!

The stranger smiled at him, as if sensing his turmoil.

"You and I have some business to attend to Jesse" he said.

"Jesse!" his friends cried.

Jesse took one look at the man, and those soulless white eyes. The enemy crouched, grinning -

"RUN!"

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer:
I have seen many monsters in my time. I fought along side the Immortals and faced many a fearsome beast.

But never have I seen a greater monster than that of the youngest brother.

There is a darkness in his heart, and it festers and grows.

I can see but I'm afraid...the First does not.

Or perhaps he does not wish to.

"RUN!"

Petra didn't need to be told twice; she turned away from the monstrosity before her and bolted.

Brine was the phantom; the phantom was the Lost Immortal!

She was terrified, but she couldn't feel more stupid either. All the little red flags, all the major warning signs...She didn't see them, because she had been so desperate to get home! She had missed her instincts telling her to flee before it was too late!

It was so obvious now. Brine coming and going so quickly, the creepy air about him; No normal old man would be like that!

There was a loud crack, and Petra glanced back for only a second to see Brine, tear up a large portion of the floor, and hurl the hundreds of pounds of rock at them. She screamed as the debris raced by, it missed Jesse by inches.

The chunk on stone smashed into the Immortal's Gate, the obsidian cracked and fell, the magical exit sputtering out.

He had broke obsidian, he had broke obsidian with stone.

"Run for the stairs!" Jesse cried.

"Which one?!" Lukas yelled.

"The one he isn't standing in the way of!"

Petra adjusted her angle, aiming for the stairs beyond the now ruined Immortal's Gate-

"No, no, stop!"

There was a voice screaming in her head, a voice that wasn't hers and it made Petra falter.

"Another way! Go another way!"

"Guys wait! Not that way!"
Jesse looked sharply over at her, "WHAT?!"

"Not the stairs!" she cried, she turned away from the door, towards the balcony, "Come on!"

"Petra what are you doing?!" Lukas cried as they turned to follow her.

"Just trust me!"

They raced out onto the balcony, quickly running out of floor.

"Peeetraaaaa!" Jesse shouted.

"Jump! Jump!"

Brine was right behind them, "No you don't-"

Lightning shot down from the sky, smashing down between the trio and their pursuer. Petra heard Brine curse, "Damn you to hell old man!"

"Where are we going?" Lukas shouted as the force from the lightning propelled them forward.

"Jump!"

Petra grabbed the boys's hands, "Over!" she yelled.

"WHAT!"

They jumped.

They screamed as they fell through the open air, a fifty foot plus drop between them and the first set of trees.

"This is the plan?!" Jesse cried out.

"What makes you think I had a plan?!" She cried. "I am literally listening to a voice in my head Jesse!"

The wind picked up, so ferocious and fast that it actually propelled the trio back into the building, three stories below from where they had jumped. They hit the new balcony hard, rolling and sliding on the stone. A little scraped up, but very much alive.

Jesse shakily got up, noticing that the stairs they almost went down moments before was collapsed on this floor. They would have been trapped. "O-okay, not gonna ask."

"Just keep running!" Lukas shouted.

"You think you can run from me?!" Brine roared from somewhere above them.

They turned and bolted for the next set of stairs, "Guys what do we do?" Petra asked, "He's an Immortal."

"Yeah, kinda figured that out." Lukas wheezed, "Do you think we woke him up when we lit the portal?"

"I don't know, I don't care, but we have to get away!" Petra said, "Jesse?"

"I don't know what we're going to do," Jesse gasped out, "But maybe if we make it to the jungle
then we can-

Brine crashed down into the room they were fleeing from, "You really think you can escape?" he laughed. He threw a sharp piece of stone.

It flew across the room, faster than lightning; it missed Jesse's head by centimeters, embedding itself into the wall. "Aaah!"

"Jesse?!"

"I'm fine! Just go!"

Lukas managed to draw his bow and shoot an arrow at Brine-

The older man caught it before it hit him in the chest. He looked at the diamond arrowhead, "Cute," he said smugly, snapping the arrow shaft, before he hurled it back.

Lukas barely ducked, the arrow just hitting the outer most tips of his hair, "Shit!"

They raced down the stairs as Brine exited the room, "I do so love a game of cat and mouse," he hissed.

Lightning struck down once again, and Petra knew it hit the building, because the entire structure shook on impact. The stair case above them collapsed, stone and other debris falling down onto Brine.

There was someone up there in that storm watching over them; at least Petra liked to think there was.

Jesse stumbled as the set they were on began to crumble, "Go to the other stairs!"

They leapt of the failing stair case, hitting the open room as the ground gave way, taking Brine with it.

"Did anyone see him get out?!" Lukas yelled.

"No!" Petra cursed, "Just keep running!-

Brine shot out of the floor behind them, shooting debris everywhere, "Games over!" he snarled.

Lukas who was at the back of the pack, and hit by the most of the rubble stumbled as a particularly large chunk slammed into the back of his legs, "Augh!"

Petra and Jesse immediately looked back, "Lukas!"

Brine was there in a heartbeat; he yanked Lukas up by his hair, and then hooked his arm around the youth's throat in a head lock. "Everyone stop moving!"

Petra and Jesse immediately stopped running, and the entire room seemed to freeze, just three out of breath and terrified youth and one unfazed demigod.

"Let him go!" Jesse demanded.

"If the results end up the way I like, I will."

Petra had her sword drawn, chest heaving, "Let him go or I'll-"
"Petra, darling," Brine sneered, "You just saw me break a thousand pounds worth of stone, do you really think it will be that hard to break his neck?"

Petra froze.

"Good girl." Brine adjusted, backing up - taking Lukas with him- till his back rested against a solid stone wall, effectively blocking any chance of a flank attack. "Now, we talk."

Lukas looked sick, he was pale and shaking, hands feebly trying to pull Brine's arm free of this throat.

"Brine why are you doing this?" Petra asked.

"Tsh," the male rolled his eyes, "Please, don't insult the old man by using his name."

"W-what? I don't-"

"Elder Brine has been dead for the last decade. But let me introduce myself." the not Brine stated. "I am Herobrine, Herobrine the famed Lost Immortal, the true second child of Notch."

Petra felt her blood run cold, "Herobrine?"

Jesse was white, "You can't be him you're dead!"

Herobrine looked at him, "Had that little vision did we? Well," He tilted his head back, revealing an ancient scar right across his throat, "My dear brother did kill me. But I'm afraid Jesse," he lowered his head back down, "He didn't kill me right."

Jesse swallowed, hand clenching, Petra had never seen him so borderline unnerved, "So what, you came back and you've been hiding as Brine this past decade?"

"No, I've been alive a lot longer than a decade, and I certainly haven't been that old man. The fact that his name was Brine was pure coincidence, merely the mistake of a poor naming job." Herobrine smiled, "I am not him and he was not me. I was simply...borrowing his body."

"Borrowing, how the hell could you-" Jesse began shakily.

"It means I killed him, possessed the empty body, then walked around in his corpse pretending to be him," Herobrine said bluntly. He hummed, scratching his chin with his free hand, "It's a shame really, he was a fairly pleasant old man. Loved by the locals, shame, really it is."

"You sick bastard, why would you do something like that?!” Jesse snapped. "Why possess a body and then just walk around?!"

"It's the only way for me to get around here unfortunately, without being noticed." the other said, "When you're a being as powerful as myself, certain parties...can sense you. I didn't need to deal with the inconvenience while I waited."

"Waited for what?!" Petra demanded, still looking worriedly over at Lukas.

"For you kids."

She froze, "...what?"

Herobrine shrugged, "Well...just him." he pointed at Jesse, "Actually."
Jesse was stiff, "I lit your damn portal is that what you were waiting for?"

"Pfft, hardly, didn't you see I broke it?" Herobrine scoffed, "The portal was a side trip; just..." he smiled toothily, "Confirming a few things."

Jesse took a step back like had been slapped, "T-then, what do you want?"

"I did say upstairs we have some business to attend, so, let's talk business." Herobrine pointed at Jesse, "You give me what I ask for and in return I don't snap your friends little neck here."

Lukas piped up, "Jesse don't you dare-ack!"

Herobrine squeezed his arm, "Shh, you're life is on the line, you don't get to have a say in this."

Lukas flinched, he seemed to have gone a shade paler, and his breathing had slowed.

"He does have a say, "Petra hissed, "And whatever you are doing to him stop doing it now!"

"It's my aura Petra," Herobrine frowned, "I have that effect on people."

"Fine," Jesse said quietly, "Whatever you want, I'll give it, just... don't hurt my friends."

Herobrine smiled, "There's a good boy, now I-"

A hand shot through the wall right behind Herobrine. It grabbed him by the back of the head and yanked. The Lost Immortal was so stunned he released his hold on Lukas as he was forced through the wall. A large portion collapse down, filling the air with thick dust.

Lukas stumbled out of the haze, hacking and coughing.

Petra got to him first, "Lukas!" he grabbed hold of him, "Are you alright?"

The blonde was still coughing into his hand, but he managed to nod, the color already returning to his face. "G-guys-"

"Shh, just get your breath back," Jesse cut in, "Then we're getting you the hell out of here."

Lukas shook his head, eyes wide, "No guys I saw-"

Another figure walked out of the haze, looking back over his shoulder as he brushed dust off his shirt. He turned his head toward the trio, blue eyes blazing like diamonds in a fire. Petra gasped as he looked at them, "You kids alright?"

"S-Steve?!!"

"S-Steve?!!" Petra gasped out.

Jesse stared in shock as Steve quickly approached them. He kneeled down next to them, "Are you guys alright?" he repeated.

"Steve...how-how did you know-" Jesse began.

"Anybody hurt?"

"No, but how did-"
"Well, well, Primus," They looked up to see Herobrine pull himself over the edge of the broken wall, bleeding profusely from a gouge in his chest. The wound was rapidly sealing. "You're timing has always been impeccable Stevanos."

Steve stood, firmly planting himself between the Immortal and the youths, "You have no right to call me that."

Herobrine chuckled, "You're right, I loved Steven so much more-"

"It's Steve to you," Steve growled, "I don't know how you got here Herobrine, but you're leaving. Now."

Jesse went wide eyed. Steve knew Herobrine?

"And you're going to make me?"

"Yes."

"Just how do you intend to protect them and hold me off at the same time?" the Immortal sneered.

Steve crossed his arms, "The same way I always do."

"And we both know that worked so well last time," the other laughed.

Steve growled, taking a step forward, "You will leave Herobrine, before I make you."

"Steve wait! You can't fight him! He's an Immortal!" Petra said urgently.

"Don't worry, I can handle this."

"No! You don't understand he-"

"Listen to the kids Steven!" Herobrine lunged, catching Steve by the throat, and hurling him into the far wall. The male's head hit the stone with a sickening crack, and he crumbled to the floor.

Jesse felt his heart stop, "STEVE!"

Herobrine turned, "Now where were we?"

Jesse got up planting himself in front of Lukas and Petra, blood boiling as he drew his sword, "You bastard!"

"Do you really think you can take me?!" Herobrine laughed.

"No, but I can!" A familiar voice shouted.

Herobrine leapt out of the way, just as three diamond arrows embedded themselves in the floor. Alex landed in front of Jesse, tearing up the arrows and re-notching them in a matter of seconds.

"Alex?!" Lukas gasped.

"And there would be Alexia," Herobrine huffed, pulling a fourth arrow out of his arm. The skin was bubbling where the arrow point had made its mark, "Or do you go by Alexis now? I do so forget all your names."

"Get out now," Alex said firmly. "Kids, stay behind me,"
"Alex, he got Steve," Jesse cried.

"Steve is fine," she replied, keeping her eyes firmly set on Herobrine.

"Alex! Herobrine threw him into a-"

"Jesse!" Petra pointed, she and Lukas looked completely stunned.

Jesse looked just as Steve got up, the wound on his head sealing, the blood slowly coming to a standstill. But he was alive.

Jesse's heart skipped a beat, "Steve..."

Herobrine caught his expression, he looked over at Steve who had finished getting up and was walking quickly towards Alex. "Did you not tell them?"

Steve didn't answer, taking a position in front of the kids. Jesse did see Steve give him a quick glance.

"Of course you didn't, you two are on the need to know basis aren't you? Well, I think they might need to know now brother dear?"

Brother?

Jesse's heart was pounding, staring at the two adults before him, realization slowly kicking in, Steve and Alex...

They were the other two Immortals! Steve was the First, Alex was the Healer!

"Steve-"

"Not now Jesse," he said quickly.

"No go ahead," Herobrine said, "Explain to them what you are. Explain how you were too weak to kill me. Explain how I have been alive for thousands of years and everyone out there beyond the First World, believes I'm dead. But I'm not am I, Steven? But you should probably clear some more important things up with these poor kids, explain to them why in the world you didn't share the juicy detail of your history with them. Oh!" he pointed, "And you should definitely explain to him where you failed him so."

Jesse looked at the adult, Steve looked momentarily confused, but he recovered, "You know you can't beat us both Herobrine. Leave."

Herobrine smirked, "Very well..." he bowed, "Children, I will see you soon, we'll conclude our business later."

"No you won't." Alex warned.

Herobrine ignored her, instead focused on Jesse, "Keep a close eye on your friends Jesse. We're not done yet."

Jesse felt his body go cold.

"Herobrine," Steve warned.

"Going," the other laughed, "Pleasant as always brother dear," then he vanished in a wisp of smoke.
and laughter.

There was silence, but Jesse’s heart was pounding so hard he could feel it pulsing through his body. With the evil demigod gone he should feel safer. But Jesse was still struck with this overwhelming wave that something was wrong. Looking at Lukas and Petra and how pale they were, he assumed they felt just as bad.

Alex lowered her bow, letting out a slow exhale.

"You guys are the Immortals" Petra said slowly.

They didn't answer, "He shouldn't have been able to get in here," Alex said.

"He broke the Gate," Steve said stiffly to her, his gears were turning, processing what Herobrine had said, "But that wasn't what he was aiming for,”

"Steve-" Jesse began.

Steve turned around, "What did he want from you?"

"W-what?"

"What did he want-"

"I don't know," Jesse stammered. "He didn't say."

"You guys are the Immortals." Lukas said.

They ignored the statement, again. "Did you three come alone, or did you come with someone else?" Alex asked.

"No, we came with Elder Brine. He had been helping us look for the gate as an option to get home. But Herobrine possessed his body, we didn't know he-"

"Elder Brine," Alex looked at Steve, "That was the patriarch of..."

"Did he have any issue getting into the temple? There should have been enchantments in place to keep Herobrine out, no matter what form he was in. Did he have trouble?" Steve demanded.

Jesse froze, recalling Brine tripping at the steps.

" Just help me in child..."

"He- I- he tripped," Jesse felt like he had committed a crime, "I helped him inside- I'm sorry- I - "

"Was the Portal lit when you got here?"

"No-"

"Did Herobrine light it then?"

"No, he said he would use the old magic to harness the gate and we had to light it," Lukas said, "What does this have to do with anything?"

"If he didn't light it, and it wasn't lit when you got here, how did it light?" Steve said.

"I lit it!" Jesse snapped looking Steve directly in the eyes, he pulled the enchanted flint out of his
inventory " I lit it with this! Why do you ask?!"

Alex's eyes went wide and she took a small step back.

Steve looked like he had been stabbed. He stared at Jesse eyes wide, Jesse noticed his hands shook and that frightened him.

"Why, is it so important to know who lit it?" Jesse asked firmly.

Steve's expression recovered and he took a step back, "What- whatever he wants from you kids, Herobrine still wants it. We," he swallowed stiffly, "We need to get you back to the house." He put a hand on his wife's shoulder. Alex looked a shade paler and she had turned away from the group, checking her arrows, "We need to pack them essentials and get them away from here."

She nodded.

Jesse had to fight down a wave of panic, "Steve wait!"

"Come on kids."

"Wait-"

Steve looked at them, "You need to leave here."

"Leave?!" Petra gasped, "But-"

"You three aren't safe until you do! You're going to leave the First World and you are not coming back."

Jesse felt like his heart stopped, "What..."

Steve turned to Alex, "I'll make sure the path stays clear, you guide them back to the house and..." Jesse saw Steve glance his way, "and don't let them leave the house till we're ready."

"Alright," the female said softly.

Steve took one more look at the kids, and Jesse stared as that expression slipped briefly through his composure. Then, with a bounding leap, Steve was gone, out the hole in the temple wall.

Alex was already walking towards the stairs, "Come on kids," she whispered.

"Alex-" Jesse reached for her.

"J-Jesse...just please?" she said with a ghost of a breath.

Jesse stopped.

Alex continued on towards the stairs.

"They're the Immortals," Petra said softly, "But I can't shake this feeling we've done something terribly wrong."

"Guys?" Lukas asked, "What have we done?"

Jesse didn't answer, his mind was still thinking about the way Steve had looked at him back there, the expression on his face...
The Festival was down five guests that night.

Alex had led them around the town, avoiding the crowds. Not once did she speak to the trio, leaving them festering in a guilt they didn't know the cause of. She had gone into the house without so much a full sentence, telling them they needed to get their things together because they would leave as soon as the next night.

Steve hadn't been with the group once during the trip back.

But Jesse, having settled on the porch to process what just happened to him and his friends saw the adult return; making a swift path into the barn.

Jesse got up from the chair.

His friends saw him get up, he must have had some expression on his face, and not a good one either because Lukas tried to stop him, "Jesse wait-

He shoved past, "Not now."

Jesse!"

Jesse stepped off the porch, and bee lined for the barn where Steve had gone in moments before. His heart was pounding, adding to a painful sensation inside of his chest.

Was this anger driving him?

Or was it hurt? Betrayal? Betrayal of what though?

He didn't have time to process it, and frankly he didn't want to. Too late to change his mind anyway, he was already in the barn.

Steve was by the stables; checking the leather straps of a saddle his back to Jesse. "You should be packing," he stated firmly.

He didn't even turn around, didn't even face him.

Jesse ignored the strong suggestion, "You're the Immortal. You're the First."

The adult didn't answer.

"So, everything you said. The First did this, the Healer did that. Those weren't stories or things pulled from history books, that was you. The whole time it was you and Alex, why did you never say-"

Steve turned around abruptly, "What do you want?" the statement was cold, and felt like a slap to the face.

"I want to know what the heck is going on!" Jesse snapped, anger bubbling up from the result of Steve's sudden indifference. "I just found out that all that stuff about Notch and the First are probably real, because I've been traveling with them! Even the Dark One isn't dead, we were almost killed by He-"

"Don't say his name," Steve cut in, "It gives him power."
"Fine! We were almost killed by you-know-who, and now your response is to make us leave!"

"You wouldn't understand," Steve looked away.

"Then help me understand!" he begged. "Please, Steve. Is it about the Immortal's Gate? We shouldn't have gone there, I'm sorry it got broken-"

"This isn't about the Gate."

"What then?! Did you need to keep your identity a secret? We won't tell I swear!"

"You're leaving Jesse! That's all you need to understand!" the other male said roughly.

"So that's it then? You lied about everything you were, and now you're just going to push us away-"

"I was not obligated to tell you!" Steve faced Jesse, eyes flashing. "Am I the Immortal? Yes! Yes, I have lived hundreds of thousands of years! I have traveled worlds, and experienced a thousand lifetimes! I have been everything they say I am! I was a king! I was a warrior! I am a God to some thousands, and I am an enemy to thousands more! But where in the fine print should I have shared this information with everyone?"

"It's not just me, the whole village-"

"The whole village knows! And they know about Herobrine! Do you think this is the first time he's been here?! They know because they needed to for their survival! But what about you?" Steve demanded, "What part of our friendship required of me to tell you everything?!"

"Because I told you everything!" Jesse cried out.

Steve froze.

"I told you everything! What I hope for! What I feared! What I...What I..." He struggled not to cry, "I even told you I wanted to stay, how it felt right and- and-" Jesse cringed, "I trusted you Steve. I could honestly care less if you were just you, or the First, or Notch himself!"

Thunder rumbled.

"But what I really want to know is what I did."

"I saw the way you looked at me back at the gate. What have I done that you want me gone? You're lying to me Steve! Your brother may have blindly led me to that door, but my eyes are open now," Jesse stared, pleading, "I know you're not telling me the whole truth. This isn't only about Hero- Him coming after us. Steve, please, I just..."

Steve was looking down.

"Steve...Steve? Please..." Jesse begged.

"It doesn't matter now," the adult male looked up, shaking. "You are leaving Jesse." his voice cracked, "And regardless of what I said yesterday...You won't be coming back."

Steve then retreated, hurrying past him as he fled the barn. Jess was unable to speak another word, unable to stop him, too shaken and broken to do much of anything.

Jesse didn't turn to see him go; he simply stared at the wall. His eyes were wide, his body shaking. A few tears successfully broke free, sliding down his cheeks, the salt stinging the cuts on his skin...
He swallowed, he wasn't going to cry, he wasn't-

After everything? All the things Steve had said...

*You're not coming back...*

Jesse finally leaves the barn, slowly moving towards the house.

The storm had finally released its rain, drenching him instantly and chilling him down to his already cold core.

Lukas and Petra are on the porch still. The female reached out, "Jesse..."

"Not-" His voice cracks. "Not now guys."

Unable to face them, and feeling broken and betrayed; Jesse silently enters the house. It's no longer inviting, no longer warm. But he goes inside anyway, never before having felt so alone.

---

**Chapter End Notes**

Disclaimer:  
Art by LunaDestiny
My grandfather Elder Brine begged me not to go. He says I am not myself, claims that I have lost my mind to paranoia.

"He has always been alive my child," he told me, "He is the secret we must never speak of lest he gain power to destroy this world."

I told him I could not live in such a place where lies are kept.

"The First and the Healer will fight him; they will always beat him,"

Bah, what does my grandfather know? He is well respected by the community, but he clings on old ways. He clings on lies. I have seen Him, I have seen him here in the First World and still the Immortal's claim he is not here.

They would "sense" him.

He's coming, and I will not risk my life waiting for battle between gods.

The First even begged me not to go, claiming if the Lost One was truly appearing before my eyes, then he must be after me. He can't protect me and my family if I leave.

How can he protect mine when he and the Healer wish to start their own?

No.

I have to leave, I cannot stay here.

I am the patriarch of my family now, I have access to my entire families books. I have spent months, years, going through them all. I tore out all of the articles on the Dark One, the Lost, and Him. I will figure him out; I will see what he is planning.

This world is no place to raise a future child. This world is no place to live. I have said goodbye to my grandfather, I wish him a long and prosperous life. But nothing he can say will keep me from leaving.

I cannot stay here.

He's coming.

A storm was rolling through Ground Town, but Aiden and Ivor were too busy to really notice the thunder and the lightning cozy and warm in Aiden's living room.

Aiden stared at the last journal entry.

That's depressing. Aiden thought, She just left...

Aiden closed the journal and set his pencil down, running his fingers through his hair with a sigh.
Ivor glanced up from his recliner across the living room, peeking through his specs, "Tired already are we?"

"Nope, done." Aiden tapped the book.

Ivor looked fully up, "You decoded the entire encrypted section?"

"Yeah, just finished the last entry."

"And?"

"She lost her mind Ivor," Aiden said, "She thought she saw your Dark One and she was afraid. She tore out everything she could find on him from her family's previous journals and then she left the First World. I don't think she ever went back."

"I wonder if she ended up in Sky City somehow." Ivor mused, "Because the collective journal came into Isa's hands."

"Who knows? You think someone would have noticed a stranger popping up in such a tightly packed community..."

"Whatever the case, let us hope that her fears were not based from a truth," Ivor said.

Lightning flashed and the thunder that followed after was so loud it made Ivor jump. The older male looked uneasily around the house, "Are you sure we're safe?"

Aiden looked up from his translated notes, "I'm almost insulted you asked that." He frowned, "I've won a few building competitions remember? I think I know what I am doing Ivor."

"As long as we don't burn down."

"We're not going to burn down-"

Lighting flashed again, filling the living room with a temporary but blinding light. The thunder roared, rattling the shelves on Aiden's walls.

"That was close," Ivor observed eyeing the torrential down pour beyond the windows.

Aiden got up and closed the curtains in the living room. He then flicked on a redstone switch, his glow stones lighting up the room. He made a personal note to thank Lukas for bringing them with him from a First World visit.

"Have you read all of her pieces yet?" Ivor asked.

"I'm going to go through them again, see if I can find anything good," Aiden answered.

He had been on a deciphering frenzy for the past few days. The last of the pages had all been in the same code. Once Aiden had cracked it, it didn't take him long to memorize which letters were meant to be what. He had been on automatic mode till the last entry so anything previous to that was kinda fuzzy.

He picked up the book and his notes, thumbing through the pages:

*My ancestors were liars...*

*The First says...*
I see Him in my dreams, Notch why won't it stop...

I have to leave, I have to leave...

Poor girl, Aiden couldn't help but think-

There was a deafening boom and Aiden jerked in surprise, dropping his papers and the worn journal on the floor. The papers scattered everywhere, and the book bent back on its spine, "Sweet Notch!"

Ivor looked up from his work, "Careful with that, that's old."

"Says the man who threw in on my table not two weeks ago," Aiden scoffed, kneeling down to pick up his papers and the book. He cringed when he noticed the inner cover was torn, "Shit..." he grumbled.

"Pardon?"

Aiden sat down on the recliner, "Nothing," he inspected the tear, wondering if it could be fixed when he noticed something.

An envelope.

At least he thought it was.

Curious, Aiden gently peeled back the tear and pulled out the envelope. It wasn't sealed shut; it looked like most of the papers had been shoved haphazardly inside. They were bent and out of shape. He tugged them out, smoothing them out to the best of his ability.

It was covered in writing; he recognized the style as the last owner of the journal. But unlike most of her writings the script was clear, and she seemed to be sane...

I have spent most of my life in fear, blindly assuming things that I knew no knowledge to. I look back through my writings, I see my insanity, all my years wasted.

I was struck with madness...

My poor husband, faithful all of these years and he never left my side. But now I look back and I see all of my mistakes. I left my home; I left my family, for a fear of someone who was never after me, after us.

I understand all those whispers; I now see all of those lies.

Those struck by the corruption of the Dark One can hear his thoughts. And by some grace of Notch alone I have regained my sanity and now understand what it was the Lost was truly after.

He seeks his brother; he seeks to strike the ultimate blow.

For so many years I feared that he meant to destroy my people, us mortals of the First World. I was stricken with nightmares of my child dead in my arms, but it isn't mine he seeks.

The First has started a family, and his Brother knows.

He is after our protector, he is after our healer, and he hunts their child. All these years blinded and he drove me mad for his own entertainment! But he was never after me, and this whole time I have been a stark raving fool!
I think of my own husband, my own child. He's getting bigger by the day, and was the only light in my darkness...To lose him.

The First, should he lose...

I am informing my husband as soon as he returns with our boy. I will tell him what I have learned. We have to go back.

I only pray that the First is still in Notch's original creation somewhere, I have to warn him. I have to tell him what's-

The writing stops, Aiden stares at the bottom of the page. It is blocked, covered and destroyed by a copper red stain.

Confused, Aiden flips the next page hoping the author picked up again where she left off-

His heart skips a beat.

The new page is splattered in the same stains as the previous, but Aiden can smell the iron scents wafting off the old paper, it smells like blood.

Scrawled across the paper in thick red - a darker shade than the stains - were crude harsh lettering as if someone has used their fingers instead of a quill.

S H H H, WE DON'T WANT TO SPOIL THE SURPRISE DO WE? ? ?

Feeling a little sickened and unusually scared, Aiden turns the pages after the entry, only to find them all blank and thoroughly soaked through with the stains. He flips back to the creepy writing, his heart pounding. There is a signature in the corner, of a finer writing but still the same gruesome stains.

Dankxneja

Catching on immediately that it is coded, Aiden yanks out a pencil. It doesn't take him long to figure out it is a twenty two shift Caesar Cipher, and he writes down the new word-

"Aiden?"

Aiden jumps a little and looks up, to seeing Ivor staring at him. The elder's eyes are scrunched in worry, "Are you alright? You've gone a little pale."

"Yeah..." He looked back down at his completed word.

Herobrine.

"Herobrine?" Aiden mumbles, not liking the weird sensation that washes over him.

"Pardon?"

"Ivor, I think you should take a look at this-"

There was a thunderous sound, so loud and strong they felt the ground shake.

"What was that?" Ivor exclaimed.

"I-I don't know."
"That couldn't have been thunder, I didn't see any lightning."

"No, I didn't either."

The bang came again, followed by a second sound. It traveled over the storm all the way from Ground Town.

Screaming.

People were beginning to scream.

"That's Ground Town!" Ivor gasped.

Aiden was already pushing off the chair, dropping the journal and the hidden pages onto the couch, "Something must be attacking!" He ran to the front door and hastily began pulling on his boots.

"What could be attacking? The town is too well lit for spawns and we have the wall!"

"With the storm it could be anything," Aiden pulled on his arm guard, only giving himself time to barely put on the coat over his armor. Lightning flashed outside, temporarily disorienting him “There could be a building on fire, or a field.”

"But what about that noise?"

"I- I don't know."

The sound came again, making them freeze. Aiden grabbed his sword, "Shit!" he pulled open the door, immediately met with torrential rains and howling winds. "Don't let anyone in here unless they are knocking or screaming!" he said to Ivor, having to holler over the winds.

"Aiden wait!"

Aiden paused at the door, "What?"

Ivor looked solemnly at him, "Please be careful."

He nodded to the older male, "I will,"

Then Aiden was out the door.

The rain pelted him like small chunks of ice. The drops were thick and heavy, and very cold-courtesy of the cooling weather. The wind wailed nearly knocking him down several times. It was nearly impossible to see a few feet beyond the lighted path. The torches whipped and shuttered in the gale, struggling to stay lit.

It seemed to be Mother Nature's final fury, before Old Man Winter moved in.

Aiden heard the enderman before he saw it.

Vvvvp! Followed by the trademark screech.

He rolled away just as the enderman shot out of the howling dark. Its eyes were wide, jaws open, like all angry enderman.

But Aiden was startled regardless. The spawn's eyes were borderline wild, foam and saliva frothing from the mouth. It screeched and howled, swinging wildly at Aiden with little to no coordination.
He had never seen an enderman like this.

Aiden dodge again and again, unable to get a better advantage, the monster just kept coming.

"Shit!" he dived to the side, mud splashing up in his face as the enderman tried to body slam him.

Then was promptly stabbed in the head.

The enderman exploded in a puff of smoke, quickly swept away in the winds.

Gill lowered his sword, "Figured you need help." he stuck down his hand

"Shut up Gill!" but he accepted the gesture, Aiden got up, "Seriously though, I owe you."

Maya was with the larger male, her hair wet and plastered to her face, "We came to get you, there is something wrong in Ground Town!" she had to yell to be heard over the storm.

"I could hear the noise from the house," he joined them in a fast paced sprint towards town, "What's going on?"

"We don't know, but there are spawns showing up inside the wall!" Gill explained.

"Don't we have torches up?!"

"Yes, but they're still showing up!"

The village was chaos, people were running everywhere, screaming panicking. There were three buildings on fire. Spawns kept appearing everywhere, guards fighting to keep them back. Reggie was struggling to get everything under control.

"Hold the line!" He yelled to his men, "Don't let them get to the bunker!"

Aiden stabbed a frenzied zombie before it could reach the guard captain. "Reg!"

Reginald turned to face them, relief washing over his face, "Oh thank blocks you three are here!"

"Do you have any idea what's going on?!" Maya asked, shoving wet hair out of her eyes.

"Not a clue, didn't catch on till one of the building's caught fire!" He pointed to the inferno, "Gill I'm going to need your help getting my men down here together, we need to put out these flames. Maya get with Milo, help him get the people to safety, we've already got wounded! Aiden," he looked at the teen, "Isa is on the wall, she needs you up there!"

"On it!"

"Be careful man!" Gill yelled as Aiden sprinted towards the battlements.

"You guys too!"

He raced through town, dodging screaming locals and angry spawns. He was almost trampled by a horse, the poor animal driven into a panicked frenzy.

What was going on?!

He raced up the wall's stairs onto the battlements, finding Isa drenched, armed, and screaming orders.

"Get me archers! Spread out along the wall! Don't let those blighters get close!"
"Isa!" he called as he ran up to her.

She whipped around, hair snapping like a whip as she turned, "Aiden! They're attacking the wall!"

"What is?!!"

"Spawns, they're surging the wall, they've seem to have gone stark raving mad!"

Aiden looked over the edge of the battlement, able to see flashes of creeper explosions in the dark. With each flash of lightning he could see spawns, dozens upon dozens smashing themselves against the fortifications.

"Get torches down there!" Aiden said, "We need to see them coming!" He turned to the nearest archer, "Get down to the store rooms, grab all the torches you can find, we need to see them!"

The man, nervous and pale managed to squeak out an okay, and then raced towards the stairs.

"Aim for the creepers!" Aiden hollered to the archers, "They do the most damage don't let them explode!"

The barrier was four layers thick on its outer wall. With some hollow interiors for hallways and store rooms, followed by the inner part of the wall being four more blocks thick. It was designed to make it near impossible for spawns to break in.

But here they were trying anyway.

"What is wrong with them?!!" Isa cried, "Do you think it's the storm?"

Aiden flinched as lightning cracked down, "I don't think so! We've had storms before!"

"I've never seen a storm like this!" the woman countered, she picked up a spare bow and quiver, aiming into the dark.

Aiden didn't answer, he looking uneasily out into the gale the beasts and monster's numbers seemed to grow with each flash of light.

Something race by rapidly in the corner of Aiden's vision, and he looked down just enough to see something aim for the middle of the wall. It was coming hard, it was coming fast.

It was on fire.

"Everyone away from the-!"

The midsection of the wall exploded and the upper half collapsed caving in on itself. Aiden, Isa and a few others unfortunate enough to be close to the cave, screamed as they toppled from the fortification.

Aiden hit the ground hard, covering his head as rock and iron tumbled down upon him pelting him in the back and shoulders.

He looked dizzily up, his ears ringing and his sight disorientated. The wall hadn't collapse completely, thank Notch, the lower half still stood, damaged but standing. He had landed on the outside of the wall, with most of the debris. He couldn't see any other archers that had fallen with him, they must have landed inside the barrier.

"Where are they?!!"
"Get some lights down there!"

"Milady! Milady?!"

Torches started falling down from above the wall, lighting up small patches of area around the disaster zone.

Aiden struggled to get up, some section of his right leg was killing him. A torch landed next to him, and he looked back, able to see a bloody tear through his jeans and on his calf.

Isa groaned from somewhere to his left.

"Isa?" Aiden staggered up, just barely able to dodge a screeching creeper as it lunged at him from the dark void. His leg was aching, but it wasn’t broken. He dodge the creeper again, kicking it back, cringing as his leg protested. It came again, and he stabbed it in the skull.

The monster toppled over, disappearing in a puff of black smoke.

"Isa?!"

The female moaned again, and Aiden moved toward the sound.

He found her under a support beam, half of her face covered in red. "ISA!" Aiden dropped down next to her, shoving the beam off, "Isa, can you hear me?!"

The beam and debris had merely cut skin and cloth, the majority of her body was barely damaged, but as the rain washing the blood away revealed a grisly gash on the side of her head.

Aiden tried to lift her, but unable to do so cradled her in his lap, "Isa, Isa, I need you to get up! Isa!"

She hissed in pain, eyelids fluttering, "A-Aiden?"

"Yes it's me! We need-

An armored zombie moaned as it staggered towards them. Aiden gently lowered Isa down on to the ground, "Hang in there, I'm not going to let them get you!" he whispered urgently.

His sword was gone; he lost it in the fall. So Aiden picked up Isa's weapons; wielding the two iron blades menacingly. He stepped over the fallen woman planting himself firmly between her and the oncoming spawns.

"Come and get it you bastards!"

There were three zombies now, the first one screeched, swinging it's arms. He pivoted around it, swinging towards the exposed neck. But the zombie was fast, faster than most, it spun around to face him, the blade glancing harmlessly off the chest piece.

"Shit!"

The second made a lunge for Aiden's outreached arm, mouth red and full of rotted flesh. This one wasn't protected; so he brought his second sword up, impaling it into the skull.

One down.

He flipped forward as the third lunged for his legs, groaning and staggering as his leg sent shots of pain up and down his body.
The armored one hissed, swinging its fists, the making contact with the side of his head. "Ugh!" He fell back crashing against the third, it grabbed onto him trying to bite.

Isa moaned, and the armored one turned, lumbering towards her. "No!"

Lifting up both his feet and using the zombie to support his weight, Aiden slammed his feet into the back of the undead monster. It staggered forward, tripping over Isa. Unable to stop from the momentum, the zombie fell into a jagged support beam, the armor no match to the sharp wood. The beam impaled the zombie clean through the middle.

That's two.

Landing back onto his feet, Aiden flipped the last one over him, landing it on its back. Then with a furious yell, he brought down both his swords, stabbing the zombie in the throat and chest. Three.

"Aiden?" Isa moaned.

Chest heaving for air, Aiden got up, "Hang on Isa, I'm coming!"

A sound cut through the storm, it almost sounded like...like a *chuckle*. But it couldn't be, because it was clear, and it was close, like someone had laughed right into Aiden's ear.

"R'm fxah vxan jkxdc hxdabnuo cqjw qna..."

He swiftly turned around, heart stopping as he stared at the monster before him.

"Cqjwt hxd, oxa bjhrwp vh wjvn."

The storm wailed on, and no one on the other side of the wall heard Aiden's screams.

The last night of the festival had lanterns. Hundreds, no, *thousands*, of paper framed lights floating up into the sky.

It was beautiful.

But Jesse found little happiness in it. He was too busy wishing he could go back, forget the Immortal's Gate, and forget Herobrine. He wanted to go back and just be satisfied, happily dancing the night away with his friends.

A what if...

But here they were, at the temple to the portal and getting ready to leave the First World for good.

It had taken Steve and Alex longer to prepare than they had preferred. The night after Herobrine's reveal, they packed up the horses and then led the teens up to the abandoned village and its temple.

There hadn't been so much of a word, not even a conversation. Alex would occasionally say a few things to Steve, always in the old tongue, and Steve's answers would always be short. But he would never speak to Jesse.
He didn't even look.

The plan was they would escort them all the way to Ground Town, and leave them there, never to speak again as it were.

Petra and Lukas had tried speaking to Jesse a few times, but he didn't feel like talking.
Jesse sat solemnly on a broken pillar, waiting as Steve and Alex debated by the exit.
Steve inspected the portal, "I don't like it."
"He usually makes a peep by now," Alex admitted.
The male immortal let out a growl, "He's planning something Alex, we just need to figure out how he's going to do it."
"Steve, he probably knows that."
"We can't talk about that." Steve's voice cracked slightly.
Alex bit her lip, and Jesse watched as she glanced his way. "Perhaps if we went ahead and made sure the Hallway was clear?"
"And leave them here unguarded?"
"We'll be faster if we both go, and if they just run through the Portal we'll know..."
Steve sighed. He turned to the trio, "Alex and I are going to go ahead and make sure the path is clear. You three stay here with the horses till we get back."
"Kay," Lukas said quietly.
"If Herobrine does come here, run through the portal, and just keep running," Alex said, "We'll be able to get to you."
"Alright..." Petra answered.
Steve looked at Jesse, almost like he was about to say something, but Jesse looked quickly away. He watched from the corner of his eye as Steve's and Alex's expression switched briefly to one of immeasurable grief, and he struggled to fight down the awful sensation in his stomach.
"We'll be back soon," Steve said quietly.
Lukas waited till the adults had gone through the portal, he looked to Jesse, "Are you alright?"
Jesse hadn't told either of his friends about the 'discussion' he and Steve had, "No," he said bitterly.
"Look I know we screwed up," Lukas encouraged, "But we'll think of something, and then we'll come back-"
"They said we can't come back," Petra cut in.
"And there is no point in it anyway," Jesse said.
"That's a pessimistic view for someone so young."
All of three of them leapt up in horror, looking to see Herobrine leaning against a pillar at the
"Run!" Lukas yelled, firing an arrow at the demigod.

"I'm not physically here," Herobrine said, casually inspecting his nails as the arrow phased through his forehead.

"Don't listen to him, just run!" Petra hollered.

"Whatever, it is blood on your hands..." Jesse stopped running right at the magical exit, he looked back, "What do you mean by that?"

"Jesse!" Lukas hissed.

Herobrine looked up, "I mean, what I say."

"Forget what he says!" Petra snapped, "He's bluffing!"

"I never bluff. If Steve and Alex were here they would agree."

Ignoring his friend's pleas, Jesse pulled his foot out of the portal, "What do you mean blood on our hands?"

Herobrine stood, walking deeper into the temple, his legs passing through all the rock and rubble. Jesse noticed with growing unease that the male had fresh blood staining his hands. "I'm giving you an option Jesse. You and your friends can leave right now, and luck being in your favor I will only find you till you are at the end of your lifespan. The Hallway is vast and even I have trouble navigating it sometimes. But if you leave now, it's blood on your hands."

"Jesse don't listen to him please!" Lukas begged.

Jesse remained silent.

Herobrine smiled. "I'd knew you'd see it my way."

"I never said I did,"

"Oh, but you will." Herobrine pointed to Mt. Incendia, "This has now become a life or death matter Jesse. If you don't meet me at the volcano by the time the moon peaks at midnight, someone will die."

"WHO?!" Jesse's heart skipped a beat.

"That village has a lot of people don't you think?" the other answered, "Who'd miss one or two."

"You bastard!" Lukas yelled.

"It's only business," Herobrine huffed, "You will come up to the mountain Jesse, alone. Or you will leave, I don't care, but one path ends up in someone dead. Or...if I'm really bored..." he rubbed his jaw glancing at the village and the lanterns, "More than just one..."

Jesse growled, "Hero-"

"Those are my terms, leave and live, but also live with the thought that someone died at your hands. Or...come see me. You can only come alone, either of your little friends follow and I'll kill on your
behalf. Remember." He pointed up, "Moon's peak."

Then in a flash of smoke and fire the spectral Herobrine vanished.

"We need to go get Steve and Alex!" Lukas said urgently.

"He's bluffing, he has no one up there!" Petra snarled.

"But what if he isn't?!!"

"Steve and Alex would have sensed him attacking someone wouldn't they?"

Jesse stood there, his heart pounding, blood racing. This was a confrontation, Herobrine intended to get what he wanted, and he wanted it tonight. He crossed the room.

"What we need to do is-" Petra spotted him unloading Titan, "Jesse wait! What are you doing?!"

"Going to face Herobrine," he stated.

Lukas ran over and grabbed his arm, "We'll come-

"No! You heard him! Someone will get killed if you do," his heart started pounding faster, thinking of what happened the first time Herobrine attacked. His arm was around Lukas's-

They can't come. He won't let them.

"You can't be serious!" Petra argued, "It's a trap, probably to kill you! You face him and you'll be killed! We don't even know what he wants from you!"

"I know that!" Jesse snapped, "But I can't leave with someone dying!"

"He could be bluffing!"

"Do you really think Herobrine is a bluffer?! Because when he had Lukas it didn't seem like he was bluffing to me!"

His brain was going a thousand miles a minute. *They'll get hurt, they might die...all he needs to do is get one of them-*

"You don't even know how to get up there!"

"Mt. Incendia is kinda hard to miss it Petra! Besides, I've seen the old maps in Steve's study. There is an entrance to the volcano interior a mile away from the village."

"You cannot go alone!" Lukas pressed, still holding Jesse's arm, "We can't let you do this!"

*I can't let them do this. It'll be just like Reuben, they'll die, just like him. They'll die helping me!*

"Lukas let go..."

"We can come up with a plan Jesse-" Petra said.

"We'll get Alex and Steve," Lukas added.

"We don't have the kind of time! Now, let go!" Jesse said again.

"Just listen-"
"Lukas, I said, LET GO!" Jesse snapped, he shoved the blond away from him.

Lukas stumbled back, eyes wide with shock.

Petra was gaping, "Jesse what the hell-"

I have to say this; I have to do this-

His next words hurt him down to his very core. He knew he would regret it for the rest of his life, but he had to say it. He had to keep them away.

"I don't need your help!" Jesse yelled, "I never have, I never will!"

The hurt on their faces was immediate, spreading across their expressions like a virus. Lukas actually took a step back away from him. Jesse's heart clenched painfully, he wanted to stop, he wanted to say he was sorry-

"I can handle Herobrine!" He said, struggling to keep his voice from cracking. "I don't need you! You'll just be in my way!" He finished unloading the supplies from Titan and got on the horse.

"Jesse wait-" Lukas began.

"I don't need your help, and I don't- I don't need your friendship!" he choked on the last word. But he swallowed his pain and managed to get it out. Jesse glared at them, "Just go away! No one else is going to die! Go home!" then he kicked Titan forward.

"JESSE!"

He didn't listen, already beyond the temple and halfway through the ghost town. Titan could sense something was wrong, and Jesse could tell the animal wanted to turn back. But Jesse wouldn't go back, he couldn't now...

He was alone now.

He had to do it; he had to say what he said. Herobrine would have-

*Herobrine.*

Jesse's blood boiled.

He'd face Herobrine, and he'd take strength knowing that despite the cost he had kept his friends safe and alive.

Heart broken, and anger rising, Jesse urged Titan forward and headed for the volcano.
Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer:
Art by LunaDestiny
"I knew you'd see things my way."

Jesse cried out in surprise, and Titan lurched in terror, rearing up in a panic. Jesse was thrown from the mighty Clydesdale, crashing hard on the gravel, "Augh!" he still had a hand on the reigns, but the animal was in a crazed and desperate attempt to flee, so Jesse let go.

He ducked as Titan turned and fled, leaping over him and into the night.

So much for getting to the volcanic city quickly...

Jesse had ridden around the town, to avoid the crowds and to avoid any explanation. He had only run into a few spawns and the traveling was going smooth. He still had a good hour or two before midnight, he knew he'd make it.

Till now.

Jesse was still about a mile away from the entrance, and now Herobrine was here.

Herobrine stepped out of the shadows, his face passing through a branch, his form momentarily disturbed like smoke in the air before returning to its rightful place. "Careful...never trust a horse, they're crafty at both ends and shifty in the middle."

Jesse growled and got up, "Any *smart* animal would stay away from you."

"Any smart *person* would too."

Jesse growled again and started trekking. Herobrine was mocking him, trying to get under his skin, but Jesse was determined to not give him the chance.

Herobrine followed, "I'm honestly am surprised. Here I'd thought you'd wait for Steve and Alex."

"I'm not going to wait for them to come back when you have someone up there."

Herobrine hummed, "I'm sensing a little hostility towards the couple. Are you still upset that Steve wouldn't explain his actions at the Gate?"

Jesse said nothing, pushing aside a branch and letting it swing back. It went through Herobrine's throat, and Jesse truly wished it had taken his head.

"You would enjoy that wouldn't you?"

He was reading Jesse thoughts, he was in his head-

Jesse snarled, "Go away Herobrine."

"I'm just checking to see your progress, because frankly I'm bored."

"Don't you dare."

"What?"

Jesse glared as Herobrine stepped in front of him, walking backward to keep eye contact. "Don't you
dare kill whoever you have up there."

Now it was Herobrine's turn to frown, "And what makes you think I would do that? What even makes you think I have a hostage? I said life or death earlier not hostage."

"It's the only way to get me up to you. And, because you would get bored, you kill them. Do that, deals off."

The demigod huffed, "Very well, I swear on Notch, not to kill the supposed hostage I have in the mountain. Happy?"

Thunder rumbled above them, and Herobrine glared up at the sky.

"Daddy issues?" Jesse snarked.

The whites of Herobrine's eyes flashed, "Sorry kid, you're not going to succeed where I did."

"What do you mean?"

"You're not going to get under my skin."

"I'm- You're not-"

Herobrine leaned in and Jesse actually stopped walking despite the fact he knew the other male was a ghost. "If anyone has daddy issues, it be the kid with the murdered parents."

Jesse flinched, he was stunned, "How would you-"

Herobrine smiled, "You have less than two hours kiddo. Better hurry."

Then he was gone.

But there were three zombies, two creepers, and five spiders in his place.

"Herobrine!"

The volcano rumbled. It almost sounded like laughter. Herobrine had been right, and Jesse had failed.

The Immortal had gotten under Jesse's skin.

_____________________________

Lukas was sitting on a broken pillar silent as the stone itself. Petra paced angrily back and forth in front of him. Both were trying to process whay had happened in their own way.

"What makes him think we will stay here?!!" Petra snapped. "Who put him in charge? I mean yeah - okay we kinda did - but who does he think he is?!"

Lukas said nothing, he was still going through what Jesse had said, still trying to filter through it.

"I don't need your help! I never have!"

"Does Jesse honestly think Herobrine isn't going to try something?!!" Petra ranted, "Argh! The idiot!"

Lukas frowned, squinting a little.

"I don't need you! You'll just be in my way..."
"What about that thing Herobrine said?! He said it was a life and death matter! He must have a hostage; he wouldn't just go down to the village to kill someone! How is Jesse going to save them? I know he said Jesse should come alone but we could have thought of something- We could have helped! Augh!" Petra threw a rock, the stone hitting the temple wall with a loud crack, "Dammit! Dammit all!"

"Just go away. No one else is going to die! Go home!"

No one else...is going to die...

Lukas's eyes widened a little, "Petra hold up-"

"How could he push us away like that?" Petra was upset now. "Petra-"

"After everything, after what he said to us at the festival-"

"Petra! !"

"What?!" She turned to face him, her eyes a chaotic pool of mixed emotions. "Did you hear what Jesse said?" Lukas asked.

"How could I not?" She gave him a look, "You mean besides 'I don't need your friendship!'?"

"Just before he left-"

"He said 'Go Home!' Lukas!" She snapped.

"He also said , no one else is going to die!" he responded.

"No one...else? What the hell does that-" Petra's eyes widened as it clicked into place.

"We all remember what happened the last time Jesse had someone help." Lukas said quietly.

Petra covered her mouth with her hand, "He was talking about Reuben,"

"That's why he said what he said," He explained, "I get it now. He lost someone who tried to help last time. That's the reason he kept clamming up against us, that' why he wouldn't let us help..."

Petra moaned and sat down across from him, "He didn't want us to die either. That protective idiot..." She grabbed his hand, "Lukas we can't sit here and do nothing, we have to help him."

"I know, but how?"

"We can find Steve and Alex?"

"They could be anywhere in the Hallway, it could be too late by the time we find them." He thought on it, "What about Bach and the other villagers?"

"I don't think with even the entire festival backing us up we could take on Herobrine." Petra looked off towards the forgotten village, the grave, "I've seen what he did to the last one..." she returned her gaze to him, "What if we just go after Jesse?"

"Herobrine can project himself anywhere without being physically here. What if he can also see us
coming from wherever he is and kills Jesse? You said so yourself, he probably has a hostage, what if he kills them too. I think he meant what he said..." Lukas ran his spare hand through his hair, fingers shaking, "I don't know what to do Petra. If only we hadn't been so desperate to get home! We wouldn't have followed him to the damn Gate!" He fought on tears, having never felt so helpless.

Petra thought back on it, "Herobrine wanted something from Jesse back there."

"But it doesn't make sense," Petra pushed, "Why would he kidnap some random person to get Jesse up there?"

"To finish his deal?"

"Yeah but last time he had us. Your life for whatever Jesse has. So what does he have now, that he doesn't have either of us?"

"He could use his hostage." Lukas suggested, "Jesse would give up anything for anybody."

"Yeah...but what could Jesse have, the He would want?"

"I don't know-"

The Portal flashed across the room, and Petra and Lukas quickly got up. Lukas turned, "Alex! Steve! We have- IVOR!"

"In Ground Town!" Reggie cut in.

"What?!" the two youths gasped.

"Yes," Reggie explained, "It happened right during the middle of the worst storm I've ever seen. We got hit hard and fast, no one really saw what happened. But there were over four buildings destroyed, three burned. A section of the wall even caved in. And the spawns were going crazy, like they were rabid!"

Lukas eyes widened, "And you didn't see what hit you?"

"No! It came and went so fast, and just as quickly as everything started acting up they stopped and ran!"
Petra looked to Lukas, "Oh Gods, it was Herobrine!"

"Hero-what?" Ivor said slowly.

"Herobrine..." She repeated. "Ivor, he's the Lost Immortal."

The elder's eyes widen a little, "The Lost Immortal."

"Yes, and Steve and Alex, the people I told you about. They're the First and the Healer. Herobrine is Steve's supposed-to-be-but-actually-isn't-dead brother." Lukas said hastily, "We were on our way back to you guys, because we somehow ended up on his target list. Well, more accurately Jesse is his target. Which is why he isn't here...He went to face..." he trailed off.

"So this Herobrine attacked us?" Reggie asked, "For what? Knowing you?"

"He must have known somehow that is where we were retreating to." Petra said. "He wanted to destroy- But this doesn't make sense he wouldn't leave people alive. Anyone dead?"

"No," Ivor said, "There are a lot of people seriously wounded, including Isa. But so far no one is found dead. They were still sorting out when Reginald and I left to get you three."

Lukas's gears were turning, "Is anyone missing?"

"A few, but we were slowly finding all of them..." Reginald began to explain.

Lukas didn't hear, he was thinking about what Herobrine had said.

"This has now become a life or death matter. If you don't meet me at the volcano by the time the moon peaks at midnight, someone will die."

Oh no, oh no,no,no,no!

"Keep a close eye on your friends Jesse..."

No, no, no, NO!

"We need to get our-" Petra looked over startled as Lukas turned and dropped his pack, yanking out a torch, "Lukas where are you going?!"

"To the volcano!"

"What?! What happened to staying here?!"

"Herobrine should have thought of that before he decided to mess with our group!"

"What the hell do you mean?!"

Lukas had lit the torch and was already running out of the temple, "Herobrine has Aiden!"

Terror had been Aiden's last thought before he had passed out. So it was terror that he remembered first as his eyes shot open.

He cried out, everything in pain. Aiden struggled to move, fighting to get his bearings in the hot darkness around him. But each jolting and desperate movement sent harsh needles of pain all over his body. The pain only increasing with each struggle.
He winced, the pain getting the better of his panic. He settled down, too hurt to move anymore. Aiden forced himself to take slow steady breaths. Just breath, just breath. He waited, allowing his eyes to adjust, taking in the poorly lit room.

It was massive, whatever it was. He could only see so far before the darkness consumed once again. The place was all stone and obsidian, almost like looking inside of an old castle. There was torn carpet that ran through the middle of the room, and tapestries hung in shreds on the walls and ceilings high above him. A large stone table was beside him, he couldn't really see how far it actually went. Could this have been a banquet hall?

He took in the other senses next as he looked around. There was a faint orange glow; it joined with a rumble and a foul smell. Aiden recognized the sulfur like burnt smell of lava. Everything was faded and decayed, covered in a layer of ash.

He concluded he was somewhere very old, near a lava source, and hadn't had a visitor in a long time.

Where could he be? There was nothing like this back in the world that contained Ground Town? He wasn't even sure he was in the same world anymore.

Aiden shifted, no, still couldn't move, it still hurt too much. He tried to remember how he got here, tried to remember what could have happened. He thought he could remember seeing Portal doors...But really the only thing Aiden could solidly recall was the Isa being injured and fighting off the zombies.

He looked around again, still unable to find anything at all that might be familiar. Where am I? Aiden thought.

Then, much to his instantly rekindled terror, someone answered. As if he had asked the question out loud.

"Where I need you to be."

Aiden stiffened, spotting a shadowy figure sitting a few chairs down by the stone table. He shifted, slightly distressed to find that he still couldn't move properly.

"Stop squirming." The stranger said, "I don't need you bleeding to death. I'm not allowed to kill you yet."

The voice was raspy, almost like a whisper. And the statement itself made Aiden's blood run cold. Like someone had inserted ice in his veins. His heart was pounding hard, "W-who the hell are you?"

The man snapped his fingers, and as if by magic, every torch in the room came ablaze in one large whoosh. The entire hall lit up, revealing its grandeur and true size, while also allowing Aiden to make out the true form of his captor.

His heart stop beating for half a second, or least it felt like it, and Aiden now remembered everything that happened vividly.

It was that monster.

The white orbs stared, a humorous glint in them, "Did you have a nice nap?" the other asked.

"Knocking someone out, isn't considered a nap. Now, who the hell are you?" he asked again with as much confidence as he could muster.
The stranger laughed.

Aiden flinched, then flinched again as the motion sent pain through his body. He looked down, finally able to see what kept him immobile.

Tightly wrapped around him, and forcing his arms behind his back was a thin grey metal. The strands were braided together, making them thicker and stronger. All along the wire small bits of metal stuck out, some painfully digging into his skin. His blood dripped out where the skin broke, staining everything -skin, metal, clothes- red.

Barbwire.

It explained quite clearly why it hurt too much to move. They wrapped all the way down, a second set even kept his legs together. One particular barb was digging into his already wounded leg. "What the hell?!!"

"I'm rather fond of using barbwire. I'm not known to take hostages very often. It is such a hassle to keep them still, I'd really rather just kill people. But the barbwire seems to help with the squirming, at least a little." the other stated casually, picking a finger at his sharp teeth.

Hostage?!

"Who the hell ties people up with this stuff?" Aiden snapped angrily.

The man smiled, his teeth glinting in the torchlight, "It works, I already told you. And as an added bonus, you suffer and I am humored."

"You sick bastard! Who the hell are you and what do you want?!"

"I'm really not the monologuing type either," the other sighed wearily, as if he was bored. "But since I really have nothing better to do, and I can't kill you yet...I might as well, you won't live long enough for it to really matter anyway. So I will indulge you," he waved sarcastically, "Hello Aiden, I am Herobrine."

"Hero...brine?" Aiden froze.

He knew that name.

He struggled to put it together, where had he heard it. The temple back home? No. The journal! Isa's collection book! Yes! It was in the hidden page, the one covered in blood, the coded signature! "You're the Dark One..."

Herobrine clicked his teeth, tilting his head, "Mmm, no. The Dark One is usually considered the opposite of Notch. And while I have adopted the name, I'm most certainly not my old man's opposite. More of..." he thought on it, "More like the rebellious son."

Aiden stiffed.

Not the brother but the son.

He was looking at the true second Immortal.

Aiden swallowed slowly, "Y-you're not real, you-you are a myth."

"Myths don't kidnap you."
Aiden flinched.

"Honestly," Herobrine frowned, "How can you deny the existence of me, or Notch, or frankly anything to do with him; When I am sitting right in front of you telling you what I am?"

"What do you want?" Aiden asked quietly.

Herobrine stood, patting dirt off of his pants. Then he casually walked down the length of the table, closing the space between them. He stopped a few feet from Aiden, casually leaning his arm against a chair, resting his elbow upon it. "I want nothing from you. You are only here for bait, I'm afraid." he stated simply.

He treated Aiden as if they were merely speaking about the weather.

A thought that both terrified and infuriated him.

"Bait for what?"

"Whom, actually." the Immortal corrected, "You're here to bring Jesse to me."

Aiden gaped, "Jesse?! What does- Augh!" Aiden lurched backward- best he could bound as he was in pain. Herobrine had simply leaned down and touched a singular finger to his forehead. The result of the simple gesture sent agony racking through him. The small bit of contact making his mind scream, like his skull would split open.

"I made a mistake though I'm afraid." Herobrine said, practically pouting, "When I look through those lovely little memories of yours all I see is you two fighting," he squinted in confusion as he straightened back up, "What in the world did Jesse see in you worth rescuing?"

Aiden groaned in discomfort, he had torn deeper into his skin and landed on his back. The weight of his body forced the sharp barbs in his arms to dig every harder and deeper.

"I planned on taking one of his friends. He has something I want you see? So it only seems fair that I would have something he would want in return." the maniac continued, "But it seems that you two have only started to be agreeable only just recently."

"Jesse isn't going to come," Aiden managed to spit out, "Not for me."

The other scoffed, "Cute attempt. But you clearly don't know him very well. He doesn't know it's you. But even if it wasn't, he wouldn't be able to live with blood on his hands now could he? I merely told him it was matter of life and death if he didn't come here." Herobrine thought on it, "Maybe I should have told him it was you; he might have been more desperate and likely to slip up."

"Why don't you just get the death part over with!" Aiden snapped.

Herobrine lifted him up by the barbwire, "Can't I'm afraid," he said as he watched Aiden whine in pain, squirming in discomfort. "You see that hole in the ceiling up there?"

Aiden reluctantly looked up. There was a large round hole in the ceiling, allowing a crystal clear view of the night sky.

"When the moon lines up with that section of the roof, it will be midnight, then your time is up." Herobrine explained, "Jesse has then to get here."

"What do you even want from Jesse?!" Aiden said angrily, trying to ignore the fact that his life was
now on a timer, "What did he ever do to you!"

Herobrine grinned, "Nothing, just like you. He is just unfortunate enough to be in possession of something I want. Granted there are a few perks but..." he shrugged, trailing off. "Once I have it, I can get done what I need.

Aiden felt his heart skip a beat, "Which is what-"

"I'm going to get back at my brother. The First, I'm sure you've heard of him. Lukas told you about Steve and Alex didn't he?"

Aiden tried to lurch away best he could, ignoring the agonizing pain from his bonds. "Are you insane? Steve and Alex are just-

"You are still in denial?" Herobrine sneered, "The Immortals are real kid. You're talking to one right now."

Something about the way Herobrine's eyes glinted finally clicked the piece of acceptance in Aiden's mind. He looked at the psychopath and knew he wasn't lying.

"Well- he-" Aiden swallowed hard before he could regain his bravado, "Y-yeah well, Jesse's stronger than he looks! He can handle a bedtime story like you easy! He killed a damn Witherstorm-"

"Who do you think created the concept of the Witherstorm!" Herobrine roared suddenly, he threw Aiden across the room.

"Augh!" Aiden landed hard, skidding a few feet, his blood leaving a smear on the ground. The pain was unbearable, leaving him gasping and struggling to breath.

"I'm the one who put the Witherstorm idea in Ivor's little head! I manipulated his grudge against his friends and watched my corruption fester in him like a weed!" the other raged, striding across the room. "I am no bedtime story! I am a walking nightmare! I have killed thousands of mortals, destroyed entire worlds! So what makes you think that Jesse can beat me?! He and all of his pathetic little friends are gnats compared to me!"

"Wha- how do you know Ivor-" Aiden stammered, "You don't-"

"Oh, but I do. I know so much more than you will ever know in your short worthless lifetime! But I suggest you keep quiet now," Herobrine hissed, "Because I swore to Jesse 'alive' not 'unharmed'. I'm not afraid to tear out your tongue little bug."

Aiden felt his mouth clamp shut. Like an unseen force was keeping him silent against his will, like a hand pushing his jaw closed.

Herobrine's raged cooled, "That's better. Now, here is what we're going to do." He leaned over Aiden, giving him a terrifying glare, "You are bait, and you are going to be nice and distressed when Jesse gets here. Then he is going to give me what I've been after. Understood?"

Heart pounding and fighting past the force that kept him silent, Aiden opened his mouth, "What are you going to do to Jesse?" he whispered, "He's never done anything to you, what perks are there? Why do you need him to get at them?"

Herobrine smiled, "Oh, that's my favorite part, and you will find out why very soon. But first, you don't look nearly distressed enough for a hostage. And while the bravado is impressive considering, that just won't do."
Aiden's metal bonds dissolved in a sudden whisp of smoke. But before he could get up to run or do really anything, Herobrine snagged his chin with one hand; holding him tight and forcing him up onto his knees. Aiden struggled to grab onto the maniac's wrists, to somehow relieve the pain and pressure. But his bloodied fingers failed to achieve proper grip.

Herobrine pulled him close, inches apart from his nose. His foul aura clogging his senses - he felt sick. "Tell me something Aiden," he whispered, his broad grin making Aiden's body run cold despite the intense heat of the air.

Aiden knew there was no way in hell he was leaving this place alive.

"How good are you at holding your breath?"
The zombie gurgled as it went down, not disappearing like other spawns usually do. Black blood oozed from the side of its skull staining the rock and running down the slope.

They kept doing that, no matter how many times Jesse had seen it happen thus far tonight, he couldn't get used to it. It felt so wrong.

He pulled his sword from the now officially dead corpse, and he flicked his blade. He made a face of disgust as he let the innards and gore fling off. The ones that failed to poof away always left such a mess.

This was the eightieth something zombie in the last half hour.

On top of the fiftieth something spider, the thirtieth something creeper; and the he-had-stopped-bothering-to-count something enderman...

Jesse looked back down the path he was traversing and the never ending mess of dead monsters and loot piles.

He had only done about three quarters of his last mile, and Jesse was physically and emotionally drained.

Herobrine was making this difficult; he had no doubt on that matter. He wanted Jesse to be late, he wanted blood to be spilled. Jesse glanced at the sky; the moon was already coming over Incendia. Midnight was getting closer and he was running out of time. It would have been easier trekking the lone mountain if Petra and Lukas were here.

The thought of them made his heart ache. The expression on their faces after he had yelled at them was burned in the back of his mind, never to leave and forever to haunt him.

He did not want to hurt them like that, especially since they've been through so much together. But he had to, Herobrine said come alone. Besides, the thought of that monster attacking his friends was a greater fear over being alone. It gave him a little support, a little confirmation that what he had done was right...

They barely made it away from Herobrine last time, and that was only because Steve and Alex had arrived. Jesse knew he couldn't protect them.

He wouldn't risk fate twice.

A spider leapt from the bushes, screeching loudly. Jesse sliced it away without giving it so much a glance.

Damn you to hell Herobrine.
He brought his blade back in front of him, the blade sticky and wet with blood and spider venom. He could see the glow of the mountain entrance, not too far up the slope. But Jesse could also hear a witch, a slime...and that might be the outline of skeleton archer up there.

Jesse growled, he was really starting to wish he had held on to Titans reigns a little better.

"Just stay here! When Steve and Alex arrive, tell him we're heading for the volcano!"

"What?! Volcano?! What bloody volcano?!"

"The big one right out the door Ivor! Just stay here!"

That was the last thing Petra had stated before taking off after Lukas. Ivor was a mixture of feelings at the moment. He was confused, he was shocked, winded, worried, and he was scared.

Herobrine...

Ivor had spotted the discarded papers shortly after Aiden left. He saw that decoded signature...and sitting here now, in this old temple, in a very old world...

Ivor knew it was all real.

Any other time, the discovery of the Immortals and the First World would have been thrilling, a great triumph in his life. But this was not how he wanted the truth to be revealed.

Because right now, three - four if you counted Lukas's statement about Aiden being true- young adults that Ivor now cared very deeply for were in danger. And he couldn't do a thing.

"I can't believe they just took off like that," Reginald was pacing , eyeing the volcano. "That's where they're going? That's where Jesse and Aiden could be? Notch preserve us I can't just stand here!"

Ivor glanced at the volcano beyond the temple doors. It was rumbling in the distance, the peak glowing orange in the otherwise dark night.

Everything in the air was tense and suffocating. Ivor knew there was something very, very, wrong with Notch's original creation. It felt like a poison, seeping into nature itself. Save for the volcano and the portal humming, the night was silent as death.

Like everything was waiting.

"They're in danger," Ivor said softly.

"And Lukas and Petra are running right towards it." Reggie frowned, "We shouldn't be letting them risk their lives. We need to go after them Ivor. I'm not going to wait around for some Steve and Alex; we have to help those kids!"

Before Ivor could respond, the portal pulsed. Ivor tensed, his hand reaching for his sword hilt despite his foot injury handicapping him.

A man stepped out, his hair dark and brown, followed quickly after by a carrot top female. They both looked tired, weary, and a little heartbroken.
"The path is clear. Come on kids, let's go before-" the male froze upon spotting Ivor and Reggie. "What in Notch's beard!" he drew his sword- a diamond blade- "Who the hell are you?!"

The female drew a bow and Reggie responded in kind by drawing his own sword.

"Where are the kids?!" the woman demanded. Her diamond arrowheads glinting the torch light, enchanted and unfriendly.

"What do you want with them?!" Reggie countered.

"Tell us where they are right now! Or I'll-"

"Wait!" Ivor hopped up, wobbling on his crutch a bit. He extended his arms, showing he was unarmed as the pair turned towards him. "Which one of you is Steve?!!" he quickly asked before things could escalate further. It was a stupid question he realized, because who would name a woman Steve? But he was trying to subdue worry and panic so Ivor's thought process was not at its finest, so he immediately added, "Or is one of you Alex?"

They didn't answer, but the question did make the pair pause.

"I'm Ivor, I'm friends with Jesse, Lukas and Petra," Ivor explained fanatically, he gestured to Reggie, "This over here is Reginald, Captain of the Ground Town Guard. He's a friend too, we mean no one harm, we're here for the kids - in a good way!"

The adult lowers his sword, "Ivor..." he mumbles, testing the name, "Ivor..."

The female's eyebrows shot up, "Oh wait! Lukas talked about you! You broke your leg right? Something to do with a cult?"

"Yes! That's me!" Ivor gestured to his wounded leg, "Enderman cult, terrible business. So I take you are Steve and Alex?"

"Yes...What are you doing here?" Steve asked cautiously.

"Our home tome- Ground Town was attacked and one of our people is missing," Reginald explained, "We came here to get help from the kids, but it seems...our problems are connected to yours..."

"Attacked how?" the male asked slowly.

"Petra said it sounded like the work of a Herobrine?"

Steve cursed and Alex went white, "Where are they now?!" the later asked.

"Jesse was gone when we got here. Herobrine challenged him to a confrontation." Ivor said, "Lukas and Petra told us to wait here for you while they went after him. They are heading towards the volcano..." he gestured to the smoking lone mountain, "Something about a city-"

Alex actually went a shade whiter, her hand shakily reaching up as she grabbed Steve's arm, "Steve...He's going to try and break the seal."

"Seal? What seal? Does this have anything to do with Jesse?" Reggie demanded.

"Y-you said they went to the volcano?" the male asked uneasily.

"Yes," Ivor confirmed, "Petra said the one just outside."
Steve looked down, shaking, "He's finishing what I started..." he straightened and turned to his partner, "Alex take these two down to the house. I'm getting the kids."

"You can't fight him by yourself! Not there!" Alex argued.

"We can help, I'm a soldier," Reginald offered, "I-"

"Out of the question! The kid's can't take him either! Alex just take them home!" Steve gently cupped his partner's chin, but his expression was firm, "We don't have time to argue on this. The more time we waste the less time I have to save him. We - I - can't mess up again Alex."

Alex looked ready to cry.

"Alex, please? Once you get these two men to safety, you can join me."

Alex looked torn, but she swallowed her emotions and nodded. The ginger hugged Steve, squeezing tight, "Bring them back, bring him back." she begged.

Steve held her for a moment, "I will."

Steve then pulled away and looks at Ivor, his eyes wet with emotion, "Thank you," he whispered. Then with a bounding leap, and a sudden rush of wind, Steve flew out of the ruin and into the dark night.

Reginald's eyes widened a bit, "Did he just-"

Ivor turns to Alex. She's has a hand over her mouth and she's shaking as she tries to wipe tears from her eyes. "You really are the Immortals," he says slowly.

"Come on, we need to get you down to the house." Was her response, she whistled and a massive horse walked into the temple, "You can ride Gaea."

Ivor hobbled over as she adjusted the straps on the saddle, tearing off now useless supplies. "Miss?" he asked softly.

Alex froze.

"There is more going on than just the Lost One needing revenge on you two. This has something to do with Jesse...doesn't it?"

Alex glanced at him, her whole body tense with compiled feelings of rage, fear, and despair.
"What's his reason, Alex?"

Alex swallows hard, tears welling in her eyes. "Herobrine never needed a reason, never has. But I'm afraid..." he voice cracks and she takes a shuddering breath.

Ivor feels his heart skip a beat, and he realizes he's afraid too.

"I'm afraid it's Steve and my fault he's after Jesse."

Jesse's feet thumped softly on the floor with each step. The sound echoed off the empty hall, giving the entire room an eerie feel.

The volcano rumbled violently, debris and dust raining down from the ceiling. A particularly large piece fell from the roof high above, hitting the stone table in the middle of the hall. It cracked the center, sending the sound tearing through the room, loud as thunder.

The grand dining hall. He had been here before, but it looked so different now.

Jesse stumbled, the ground uneasy beneath his feet and fell to the ground. He landed hard onto his stomach.

"Damn!"

He struggled to get up, not wanting Herobrine to get the jump on him while he was down. As he moved, his fingers became sticky. He paused, lifting one of his hands in confusion-

His palm and fingers were smeared in a dark red.

Alarmed he quickly looked back to the floor where his hands previously rested. There was a dark red smear running a few feet before him. Jesse felt his stomach drop when he gave the mysterious substance a whiff.

Iron, Blood.

"Are you coming?" a voice cut through the constant rumbling, though it sounded no louder than a whisper.

Jesse leapt up, taking slow circles and nervously looking around the room.

No Herobrine.

"I'm waiting," the whisper came again.

"Where are you?" Jesse snapped.

Herobrine's laughter echoed down the halls, "In the grand square."

"Where is that?" he asked through gritted teeth.

"I think you already know that Jesse..."

"What do you mean?"

There was silence

"Herobrine?"
A single torch on the wall lit up, then the one next to it. One after the other the lights flared up, leading a trail down one of the hallways on the far side of the room.

Jesse stared, recalling that same hallway from his vision.

"You don't have eternity you know..."

Jesse looked up, seeing the edges of the moon just beginning to peek through the hole in the ceiling. Taking a deep breath, Jesse followed the illuminated path. As he passed each torch, they would snuff out in a puff of smoke.

At the end of the tunnel was a door. The last torch went out; leaving him in darkness before he could examine it any closer.

Between the cracks in the door, was a faint orange glow, shifting and constantly changing in brightness. He could hear a dull roar, like waterfalls. Gingerly he touched the handle, surprised at how warm the metal was. Then he pushed the door open.

The Grand Square, the heart of the mountain.

Though, having seen its destruction first hand - the grand market looked nothing like it did post battle. Time and nature had taken the once impressive city and tore it down. It was now a desecrated pile of bones compared to its former glory. Balconies were cracked, pillars collapsed, and entire levels were missing. Stairs were damaged, buildings destroyed, tapestries were torn. Even the chasm that divided the city right through the middle had at least doubled in size since Jesse had seen its last condition in his vision. Far below lava steamed and boiled, shooting geysers high through the many levels of the city, even making it all the way to the top.

With people no longer here to harness neither its energy nor its power, the volcano worked at full strength. It was hot, almost unbearable. Jesse could feel the sweat compiling under his armor. Despite the massive hole in the ceiling - that was the mouth of the volcano- the heat and smoke remained condensed and thick. Breathing and seeing were difficult, and if it weren't for the little oxygen surviving here would be impossible.

"Not very grand," Jesse said to himself with a cough as he made his way across the floor.

"It was quite impressive, back in the day. But...you already knew that."

Herobrine was resting across the chasm, seated at the one of the old high back thrones; the chair next to him was still broken in half.

Forcing himself to stay calm, Jesse crossed his arms, "And what happened?" he asked dryly.

Herobrine looked around, "Poets and bards tell tales of two dieties fighting for the fate of the world. Legend says it went for days, leveled mountains, destroyed lives. But they're exaggerating."

"Because you were there," Jesse stopped walking a few feet away from the cliff edge, too nervous to get any closer to the long drop and the deadly stop. He gestured, "You were there, you and Steve."

"Correct."

"You destroyed that village in the mountains and Steve came to stop you."

"Once again you are correct," Herobrine grinned. "I attacked, and Steven defended them. The battle lasted days you see. But only in small bursts. The big battle," he extended his arms out, "The grand
finale ended here. This is where it all really came down. Which you know about, since my old man was so kind to grant you a vision."

Even through the volcano's song Jesse could hear the thunder high up in the heavens.

"I saw it," Jesse looked around at the walls, cracks and impact points littering the city everywhere, "I just don't understand why here."

"This was our home, it's what we built together. So he decided to kill me and remove our legacy in one blow."

"Yes but-"

"Obviously he failed," Herobrine motioned to his throat and the grisly scar. "He did damage all right. Destroyed my eyes, impaled my throat but didn't kill me. If you ever speak to him again, ask about the scar hidden under his jaw. That's where I cut him deepest when I slashed his face."

Jesse stiffened, recalling the morbid mark the Lost had left upon the First during the battle.

"But enough chit chat, that's not the reason we're here, is it?" Herobrine grinned, sharp teeth glinting in the lava light, "I will admit, I am surprised you made it on time."

Jesse frowned, shifting uneasily on the unstable ground. All around him pieces of floor broke off, falling down the slope and into the chasm.

"You didn't make it easy," Jesse flicked a piece of ash off his armor, "Kinda funny coincidence that all those spawns were by the volcano base, don't you think?"

"Truly a strange phenomenon."

The volcano shook violently and Jesse struggled to stay upright. Across the fiery pit a large chunk of stone fell from the ceiling landing right behind Herobrine's chair.

But the demon remained as calm as a meadow.

Jesse waited for the tremor to pass before straightening. The constant fear of death over his head made him angry. "What do you want from me Herobrine? You said it was a life and death matter!"

"And it is."

"Then show me!"

Herobrine shook his head, "Tsk, what's the rush Jesse?" he stood, "I have all the time in the world."

"Well I don't."

"Do you, do you really, I wonder?"


"Same thing I offered at the Gate, so it's simple." Herobrine extended a hand, "I'm offering a trade."

Jesse was taken aback, "A...trade?"

"Yes, you have something I want Jesse. I'll give you something you want-"
"You could have nothing I could want!" Jesse snapped.

"Oh, but I think I do..."

"If it's the hostage Herobrine leave them out-"

"Why don't you come over and see." Herobrine waved his fingers.

Rocks broke off from various points in the room, condensing together to make a bridge across the chasm.

"Shall we discuss terms?"

Jesse stared at the 'bridge'- barely together over a pit of flaming death - He looked at Herobrine. "Pardon my mouth, but hell no."

"If I had wanted to kill you, I would have done it already." Herobrine replied firmly, "And certainly with something more messy than plummeting you to your death."

Jesse frowned.

"My patience grows thin Jesse," Herobrine warned. "Either cross the bridge or my end of the bargain expires. Literally."

Jesse stepped uneasily forward on foot coming to rest on the bridge. He glanced slowly at Herobrine; the man had his arms crossed impatiently waiting. He took another step and the makeshift crossing still held. Jesse took a deep breath and crossed as quickly and as un-terrified looking as he could manage.

Herobrine smiled, "I'd knew you'd see things my way."

"Stop saying that," Jesse snapped. "Because I'm not! Now show me the hostage or there is no deal, and there is nothing you can do to stop me from walking back over and leaving!"

Herobrine raised an eyebrow, "And if I dropped the bridge while you crossed?"

"You said so yourself," Jesse glared, "If you had wanted to kill me, you would have done it. I think you don't want to, at- at least not for the moment anyway. I'm not stupid Herobrine."

"You have no manners," the other scoffed, "Did the priestesses teach you nothing at that quaint little orphanage of yours?"

Jesse said nothing.

"Very well, this is what I offer-

"Hostage first." Jesse cut in. "Let them go."

"Don't interrupt!" Herobrine hissed, eyes flashing. The mountain shook as if to match his temperament. "Unfortunately for both you and my hostage Jesse. That is what I am offering to you in exchange for what I want."

A large ball of smoke appeared by Herobrine's chair and Jesse frowned, "You kidnapped smoke?"

"Look closer."
Jesse moved in a step or two, but kept a fairly decent distance. He didn't want to get too close to Herobrine or the mystery contents of the bubble. He leaned in a little as the smoke parted-

His eyes widened, "AIDEN!"

Aiden was trapped within the blacken haze of the orb, wounded, bloody and fighting violently against restraints that Jesse couldn't see. He was gasping, chest heaving, like he had no air.

"W-what are you doing?! What is that?! Stop!"

Herobrine had summoned a dagger out of thin air, and was picking his teeth with it, "It's condensed volcanic fumes. I've been cutting his oxygen on and off for about..." Herobrine glanced at the moon, "An hour now? Did you know he can hold his breath a fairly decent time?"

"I don't care! Let him go!" Jesse yelled, horrified. "I can't do that.I already told you, he's also the bargaining chip." he chuckled, "I did tell you to keep a closer eye on your friends Jesse."

"Let him go now!" Jesse bolted toward the orb, getting ready to draw his sword; when Herobrine flicked his wrist in Jesse's direction. A hot gust of air sent him skidding backwards and crashing to the ground, landing on his stomach.

"Not until I get what I want."

"Then stop suffocating him!" Jesse panicked, pushing up onto his elbows.

Herobrine snapped his fingers and the smoke seemed to thin up a bit inside the bubble. Aiden sagged in relief, chest moving shakily in and out. He fell against the side of the bubble, pale and exhausted. Aiden spotted Jesse, and weakly but desperately tried to tell him something, but Jesse couldn't hear him.

"I'm so sorry Aiden I-"

Herobrine chuckled.

Jesse let his head drop, staring at the ground, "You're sick," he hissed.

"Thank you."

"What do you want from me?"

"Just a little something you took by accident." Herobrine got up from his chair, patting Aiden's bubble as he walked by.

"And what would that be?"

Herobrine hummed, "Do you recall that little incident with the Witherstorm?"

Jesse cringed, "I don't have the command block, if that's what you're after. It's broken, and besides it didn't work."

"I'm not after some silly old block. I'm after the power of the Witherstorm itself."

Jesse looked up, confused, "I don't understand."
"Then listen very carefully," Herobrine kneeled down in front of him, "Because I'm only going to explain this once."
"Every being in the universe has collective pool within them which contains power. Their *experiences* if you will." Herobrine explained. He was walking back and forth staring Jesse down from his spot on the ground. "Everything anyone ever does in their life turns into this experience power. Anything you learn from, anything you puny mortals overcome, applies to this law."

"What does this have to do with the Witherstorm?"

"When two separate beings face off in combat," Herobrine continued, "The survivor takes the power of the deceased. Every time you slay a spawn or another person, you take their power with you. The more you kill, take or earn the stronger you become."

So when I killed the Witherstorm," Jesse frowned, "I took this- its power?"

"Well...that's the *kicker* Jesse," the Immortal went back to his chair, casually sitting down. "You see, depending on a person's inner power, only so much power can be taken. You cannot take the energy of another if their power exceeds yours. You can only take a small amount. Say for example, that a chicken, by the grace of Notch, managed to kill an enderdragon. He would only be able to take a small amount of the former enderdragon's power. Power taken beyond a person's limits will drive them insane."

*Like you,* Jesse thought bitterly.

Herobrine raised an eyebrow and smirked slightly, as if he had heard his thoughts.

Jesse stood up, shakily brushing himself off, "So I have the Witherstorm's power, but you are implying I should have lost my mind."

Herobrine was broadly grinning now, "Only a few people in the entire universe could have absorbed that things power Jesse..."

Jesse shifted, having difficulty handling the sudden wave of unease cutting through his internal terror. He didn't like the way Herobrine smiled at him, "You are one of them?"

"Well yes, but imagine my surprise when I came to collect and there wasn't even a drop of power left. There was *nothing*. I thought perhaps Steven had it..."

"So what?" Jesse frowned, "You're saying only Immortals have the power to absorb anything in the universe? You, Steve, and Alex?"

"Yet here you are," Herobrine gestured, "With all the experience."

Jesse squinted, "What are you implying?"

He smiled, "What do you *think* I'm implying?"

"That I'm an Immortal," Jesse scoffed, "But for me to be one, I'd have to be created by Notch, which I'm not. So then I'd have to be-" he stopped.
Herobrine's smile widened, and the words that came next...

"There is a reason your parents weren't in the picture Jesse."

Jesse couldn't breathe; he was struggling just to take the next breath. The world around him seemed muted; he was trapped focusing on this possibility that- Jesse shook his head.

"Steve told you he lost his child didn't he? But he didn't say how. And didn't you tell him that you never knew your parents? If you look at the resemblance-

It was too much, too much for Jesse to swallow. It couldn't- there was no way- Steve would have...His jaw clenched and he glared at Herobrine, "That's stretching it, even for you."

"I only tell the truth when the truth hurts more."

"I don't believe you!"

"Think about it kid. When I look at you there are so many signs that point to it." Herobrine stood and started to walk circles around Jesse, "You have no parents, and they have no child. You're the right age." he snapped his fingers, "Then there are all the little things about you too. Immortals draw people to them, it's a little power they are blessed with. The people you meet either despise you for reasons unknown to them; or they have complete trust in you. They want you to lead them, they rely on you."

Herobrine stopped walking, sticking his hand into the smoky prison that still held Aiden. He grabbed the youth's chin, wrenching his head and forcing him to look at Jesse, "Do you really think a normal person could make allies out of a sorry punk like this. He tried to kill you, pushed you off a floating city. Now look at him! You're friends now? How does that work I wonder?" He removed his hand letting Aiden's head drop.

"And what about Lukas, Petra, and Ivor too? Do you even think they would follow you if you were normal? They hardly know you Jesse. It's been what- a few months at most? Anyone else would have gone off on their own way. Yet here they are, blindly following you along. Well until recently that is. It was pretty easy for you to push them away like that don't you say? It's because you were never friends." He sneered.

Jesse cringed, "Liar."

"Then there is good ole Steve and Alex. You woke up in their house wounded and delirious, and then not two hours later. You were sharing food with each other. You trusted them because they have that effect on people, same way they trusted you." Herobrine mocked, "Didn't you tell Steve you thought about staying here, and how it - and I quote 'felt right'. You felt like you belonged and something about them just clicked didn't it? Family instincts perhaps?"

Jesse took a step back, "N-no."

"You're the Immortal's Child Jesse," Herobrine laughed, "It's the only reason you were able to absorb the Witherstorm. You have the blood of two Immortal's and the power of Notch in your veins! You're Steve and Alex's biggest mistake, their biggest regret, and the one thing they couldn't protect. They never tired to get you back because of me!"

"You're lying!"

"I don't care if you believe me or not! You have the experience of the Witherstorm and you will give it to me!"
"Why do you even want it?!" Jesse snapped, "You're powerful enough!"

"The Witherstorm devoured half of your world Jesse. The amount of raw power in the creature hasn't been seen anywhere in the universe for over half a millennia. It's power is all I need to get my edge. Then I can finish what your father started."

"You're obsessed!" Jesse spat.

The other tilted his head, "Obsessed? Now that depends on what side of the story you've heard. But it doesn't matter anyway. We're done debating now. You better decided if you are going to give me what I want Jesse and you better pick fast." He jabbed his head towards Aiden, "It is well past midnight and I cut his air supply off over a minute ago."

Alarmed Jesse looked to Aiden, horrified to see the male limply lying against the bubble. Jesse rushed to it, "Herobrine stop!"

"No,"

"Herobrine please! Oh Gods!"

"Tick, tock, his time is running out. But you can still save him, you know what I want."

"Fine! Fine! Take it!" Jesse cried, "You can have your stupid experience power, I don't care! Just let him go!"

"Is this an agreement? I can take what I want?" he asked.

"YES!" Jesse's heart was going a thousand miles a second, "B-but you have to swear not to hurt him once you have it- or any of my friends!"

Herobrine frowned, "That's a lot of people. Isn't his life enough?"

"Do you want the power or not?! Hurt them and you can never have it!"

The Lost One thought on it, "Fine. Steve and Alex aren't included in your protection however."

Jesse hesitated. He felt torn, it wasn't fair to them. Alex and Steve had done nothing wrong. But his friends...Steve and Alex were immortal, and they could help each other against Herobrine. They'd be alright...Right? "O-okay."

"Are you sure now? That's a lot of power to give up for such unimportant people. You can always replace them. Think carefully."

"Don't you dare!" Jesse slammed his fists against the orb. The blasted bubble may be made of smoke but it was as solid as iron against his hands. He watched in horror and Aiden slowly began to slip away from him. "Take it! Herobrine! Stop-"

Before Jesse's fists could come down for another hit, the bubble- Aiden still inside of it - vanished. There was a loud boom, almost like a bomb had gone off and Jesse felt like his breath had been stolen. Wide eyed and terrified Jesse whipped around, "Where is he?!" he demanded.

Herobrine calmly pointed. Jesse looked across the chasm just as Aiden appeared on the other side. Smoky prison now gone, Aiden was on his feet for barely a second before collapsing onto the ground like a rag doll.

"No! Aiden!" Jesse went to move, when Herobrine stepped in front of him.
"He'll live."

"Get out of my way! He's not moving!" Jesse sidestepped around the Immortal, hurrying for Herobrine's makeshift bridge.

The rocks rumbled and collapsed, they gave away just as he reached the edge of the cliff, tumbling to the fiery pit below.

Jesse whirled around, "I swear to Notch! If you killed him-"

"He's alive," Herobrine flipped his dagger around, carving an X into his shoulder, seemingly unfazed as blood spilled from the wound. "I swear upon the powers of Notch and my own power that none of your friends will be harmed while you live. Which," he grinned, "Won't be much longer."

Jesse's heart skipped a beat, and he slowly shifted away from the other male, "What?"

"Were you not listening very well back there?" the psycho laughed, "How else am I supposed to get the Wither's power?"

Jesse froze.

*When two separate beings face off in combat, the survivor takes the power of the deceased.*

Then with a victorious roar, Herobrine rapidly advanced.

"We're running out of time!"

"Shit I know! Just hold the torches closer and let me see."

Petra lowered her torch and Lukas squinted at the map in his hands. "I think we're getting close to the door."

The pair had made a brief stop at Steve and Alex's place. Taking the map out of study they now struggled to find the entrance at the base of the volcano.

Petra looked back; she could see the lights from the village through the old pines. They were still lighting lanterns and playing music, fireworks launching off on occasion. The people blissfully unaware of what was going on outside their town.

"Crap!" Lukas stressed, looking ready to crumple up the map and hurl it, "I don't know where we are Petra!"

"What if we went back and asked Bach-"

"We don't have that kinda time! We'd have to double back, and then it might be- it might-" Lukas's voice cracked.

Petra looked up; the moon was almost directly above them. It was almost midnight, and they were running out of time. "We'll find it Lukas I know we- woah!"

Lukas looked sharply up at her as Petra stumbled back into an open path, something cracking under her foot. She lowered her torch down, illuminating the ground.

The female had stepped onto the jaw of a skeleton archer, the head severed from the body.
"A spawn?" Lukas asked.

Petra looked down the trail, raising her torch. There were loots piles and bodies littered down the hill. She looked up towards the mountain, seeing more bodies up the way.

"Jesse!" Lukas gasped.

Their friend had unintentionally left them a guide.

They raced up the hill leaping over the remains of the slain spawns. There were dozens upon dozens of bodies, and that is what they could see.

"We're almost there!" Petra called from higher above Lukas.

Ahead of them, the volcano was a behemoth rumbling loudly in the night. Up close and personal it was an intimidating giant with smoke and fire pouring fourth from its peak.

Lukas swallowed nervously; their friends were in that monster.

"I found the door!" Petra yelled pulling Lukas from his thoughts.

Lukas joined Petra at the giant stone door. It was already cracked open. Jesse had come through here. They stood at the entrance, looking into the black abyss before them. They could see nothing, only blackness beyond their torches.

Suddenly a loud boom tore from the mountain, racing down the hallowed halls, echoing like a bomb. Causing the pair to take a step back in surprise.

Jesse and Aiden...

Lukas's eyes widen and he tightened his grip on his torch, "Stay close?"

"Elbow to elbow," Petra replied, grabbing his free hand with hers.

He nodded and together Petra and Lukas bolted inside and into the howling dark.

Ivor looked around the well made kitchen; there was an open cabinet in the upper corner, half a bottle of whiskey inside...

Beyond the confines of the home, nature was waiting. The night was nearly silent; the nearby village had even stopped its music and fireworks.

Alex had taken Reggie and Ivor down the mountain as fast as that horse could go. Along the way Ivor had told her everything he'd discovered in the journal entries, including the hidden pages that Aiden found just before the attack.

Alex was grief stricken but grateful to know what had happened to the journal's owner. In return she explained everything, what had happened at the Immortal's Gate, Herobrine's reveal. There were a few other details as well, details that Ivor found very difficult to swallow.

Then Alex had left, making haste after her husband and to the mountain.

Now Ivor and Reggie were once again stuck waiting, and Ivor had - unfortunately - time to contemplate. There was a lot of information to process and all Ivor was able to really do at the moment was think.
Reggie was having a bit harder time doing that. He paced back and forth between the kitchen and the porch, aggravated and nervous. He had offered his services to Alex, to which the female had firmly refused.

"I can't do this, we have to help." the guard growled.

"We don't have the means to get there."

"She left the horse."

"Perhaps," Ivor frowned, "But there is still the matter of finding the entrance-"

A large boom cut through the night and Ivor jumped in his seat.

Reginald cursed, looking sharply to the volcano, "That came from the mountain! Ivor we have to-"

"Alex, Steve?!"

A large burly man, twice the size of Reginald entered the house. "Alex! Steve! We need you- who the hell are you?!" he demanded as he spotted Ivor and Reginald. He was carrying a war hammer.

"Friends!" Ivor said quickly. "And you might be?"

"Where are Steve and Alex?! Where are the kids?!" he snarled, not answering the question.

"Alex and Steve went to the mountain! They went after the kids, they're in danger!"

"Danger from what?!"

"I don't know!" Reggie cried, "Someone called Herobrine."

The massive male froze, "Herobrine!" he cursed, "Then they can't help us."

"Help you, what do you mean help you?"

The other was already walking swiftly out of the house, taking the bottle of whiskey with him. "The spawns have come out of hibernation, and they're attacking our village in frenzy. This must be the Dark Ones doing. I have to inform the elders!"

"Wait, um Sir-"

"Bach."

"Bach," Ivor said sternly, "Allow us to help."

Bach frowned.

"Alex and Steve are helping our friends," Ivor said, "Allow us to help theirs."

"You can't do much with a broken leg," Bach stated gruffly.

"Do you have a brewing stand?"

"We have nothing to make health potions, it won't matter."

Ivor grinned, "You can make a lot more than health potions my friend." He looked to his partner, "Reggie, get that horse! We have some spawns to slay!"
Ivor couldn't help the kids, but he wasn't about to sit on the sidelines either.

Jesse jerked and rolled away as a pile of debris and rocks nearly crushed him.

"I appreciate the sport Jesse," Herobrine chuckled, "But I will get what I want."

Jesse dodged another rock, he knew full well that Herobrine would eventually catch him. But he also knew that Steve and Alex could sense Herobrine if he used an excess of power. They'd have to come back from the Hallway sometime, and when they did they would know. If he could just hang in there...

Jesse didn't like breaking a deal. But his survival instincts were kicking into overdrive. He needed to go, he needed to stay away.

That, and Herobrine probably had some loophole waiting to exploit. He'd probably kill all of his friends once he was done with Jesse.

Holding out was his best hope to keep them alive.

"I don't get why you needed me to give you the power," Jesse yelled, in his best attempt to keep Herobrine distracted, "Obviously you were going to just kill me and take it."

The Dark Immortal seemed to play along, "It's almost ironic actually. Now that you mention it... The one thing I wanted, was possessed by the one person I couldn't touch."

Jesse slid behind one of the stone thrones, "Is that so?"

"Oh trust me; I knew the moment you came to the First World. I could sense you, and I did go right after you. I have been waiting to get my hands on your power for a long time."

"So why didn't you?!"

Herobrine smashed through the chair like it was dirt, watching as Jesse scrambled away. "Like I said, I couldn't touch you. No matter what form I took, no matter what technique I tried, you'd survive somehow."

"Form?!" Jesse's gears were turning, "You mean the archer?!"

"No, that wasn't me. I did try to kill you at the watering hole, while you were unconscious. That's when I became suspicious of your heritage." the other hummed, "Then I tried the enderman."

"That trapped gate was probably your doing too!"

"Yes. I knew who you were by that point. Because the only person I knew I could never harm was Steve and Alex's child."

Jesse gritted his teeth, "Still gnawing on that bone are we?"

"They used a large portion of their power to place an enchantment on the baby, a powerful seal to keep me at bay." Herobrine smiled, "The only person who could break the seal is the wearer, which is why I needed your permission to take the power."

_It gave him the right to hurt me_, Jesse thought. He noted how Herobrine merely followed him around the square, almost casual. He wasn't rushing, or moving fast.
He was toying with him.

"I admit it was frustrating. But I needed to be sure it was truly you. So I led you and your little desperate friends to the Gate."

Jesse rolled, dodging yet another wave of rock, "What does that have to do with anything?!" he demanded.

"All that crap about old magic was a lie I made up to get you up there. Only the Immortals can light the gate, which you did. Petra and Lukas couldn't do it if you recall."

Jesse staggered, hesitating.

"Are you finally coming to accept your inheritance?"

"Go jump in a lava pit!" Jesse spat.

"You activated the old Portal kiddo." Herobrine smiled, "And Steve knew the moment you told him, he knew exactly who you were."

Steve's expression.

"Which brings up the question, why didn't he tell you?"

Jesse cringed.

"Or the even bigger thought," Herobrine whispered, "Why did He and Alex leave you to grow up all alone." the adult's breath tickled his ear, "Did they not love you Jesse?"

He gasped; he didn't realize he had stopped running. Jesse cried out in fear and ducked, the blade just missing his hair by centimeters, he scrambled away. Herobrine casually followed suit.

"They must not have cared enough to come back for you," the Immortal sighed.

"You are a liar!" Jesse started to run.

"Honestly look at you, who would? You were never adopted, you grew up by yourself."

"Stop!"

"Steve finally sees his son, and his first action is to make you leave!" Herobrine sneered, "He didn't want you Jesse!"

"SHUT UP!" Jesse cried. He looked back, "You don't know-"

Herobrine swung the dagger just grazing Jesse's cheek. But the wound sent fire coursing through his body, and Jesse stumbled back crying out in pain. He gripped the wounded flesh with one hand, trying not to scream.

"I'm sorry, did that hurt?" Herobrine teased, "It's gonna get worse!" he swung the dagger down.

Jesse managed to block with his own sword, the act sending shockwaves through his arms. His knees gave out and he buckled to the floor.

"Poor little Jesse," Herobrine sneered as he pushed down, "His family didn't want him, his little pet is dead, and he pushed his friends away. You're all alone."
Jesse snarled and slammed his head into Herobrine's face. The man cried out more in frustration then pain as he stumbled back. Jesse swung his sword, slashing Herobrine across the chest.

Herobrine let loose a feral growl, summoning fire with his hands and searing the deep wound closed. Confused, Jesse took a step back, seeing the wound failing to heal from neither the cut nor the burn.

*It didn't heal...*

Jesse's eyes widened, "You're not healing!"

Herobrine's lip twitched.

"You're trying to take the power, so that when Steve and Alex get here, you can defeat them!" Jesse took a step back, "The runes still work! You're going to kill them! This is a trap!"

Herobrine chuckled and straightened, "Clever boy. But one you already set off I'm afraid."

"Jesse!"

Jesse froze, looking towards the opposite end of the chasm, "Pet...ra?"

"Jesse! We're here, where are you?!"

Lukas!

They had followed him! Even after everything he had said to them, after what he had done.

They were here!

"I'm afraid the game is over now," Herobrine sighed. Then he lunged, fast and hard.

Jesse yelped and shoved Herobrine back, but it was a struggle. The demigod came again, he wasn't toying anymore. He intended to get what he wanted. Jesse blocked another blow, weapons creating sparks on impact.

Herobrine backed up for a moment, then jabbed, faster than an arrow.

Panic coursing through him, Jesse wildly swung out.

The dagger was knocked clean out of Herobrine's hands, skittering away and falling over the cliff edge and into the chasm.

Jesse scrambled back the best he could, closer to the edge of the ravine so Herobrine couldn't flank him.

"Hmmm," Herobrine hummed, "Now I'm unarmed..."

From the corner of his eye, Jesse thought he saw his friends appear on the other side of the chasm.

"Doesn't matter."

Jesse looked sharply ahead just as Herobrine launched forward. His hands were wide and reaching out. Jesse swung out in defense. Herobrine catching hold and grabbing his wrist before his sword could make a mark.

Herobrine yanked his sword free. And with one clean smooth spin, Herobrine turned Jesse's blade
around and stabbed. The diamond cut through Ivor's carefully crafted gear like it was paper.

"JESSE! ! !"

Jesse jerked, his throat tightened and a agonized scream tore free from him. Pain coursed through his body at an unbearable level. He couldn't breathe, he couldn't speak. His knees gave out, and Jesse would have fallen to the floor. But Herobrine gripped the hilt, forcing his weight onto the blade and driving it deeper still.

"I told you it would hurt more." Herobrine whispered calmly.

Jesse let out a whine as the other twisted his blade slightly.

"I hit nothing vital, I want you to stay alive a little longer for me. I want Steve to see why he should have chosen wiser."

Jesse tried to speak, tried to do something, anything. But he could feel himself slipping away. There was blood running down his leg, he could feel it on his hands as he feebly tried to pull the blade free. He felt drained, like all his remaining energy was being sapped dry. He whimpered in pain.

Herobrine pulled him closer, free hand weaving through Jesse's hair, "Shhh, it will be over soon enough. I want to thank you for your help Jesse. Think of it this way. Your short worthless life is finally being used for something bigger." Herobrine violently yanked the blade free kissing Jesse's forehead as he did so. He let the sword drop to the ground. "I always get what I want kiddo."

Then Herobrine released him and walked away.

"JESSE!"

Jesse staggered, for only a moment. His mind and the world around him was a fog of pain, screams and voices echoing in his ears. Jesse collapsed, darkness closing in before he even hit the ground.

"Goodbye Jesse."

Chapter End Notes

Art by: Luna Destiny
They lost sight of the door almost immediately.

The darkness beyond their torchlight was infinite. But Lukas could see doors on either side, and hallways, dozens of them.

It just kept going.

Which frustrated Petra, "He could be anywhere! Notch it goes forever!" she cried.

"Alex said there was a palace, a city, and a large scale mine down here." Lukas frowned, "We went through a side entrance to the palace, and if I remember what Alex said, the city is in the center."

"Which means Jesse could be in either one of them! Woah-"

They had run into a massive dining room, but there had already been a occupant. A creeper charged their direction, hissing rapidly. Petra let go of Lukas's hand, reaching for her sword.

Lukas stopped her, "Wait!"

"What?!"

The creeper raced by, disappearing into the hallway from wence they came.

"Creepers never skip a chance to kill," Lukas said slowly.

"Unless they're running from something," Petra looked down the long dining hall illuminated by moonlight, "We're getting close."

Lukas jogged down the length of the table, eyeing the mutiple doors going every direction.

"Jesse!" Petra called.

Lukas walked to across the room, closer to one of the halls. He knelt down, examining a drying blood smear on the floor. His heart skipped a beat. "Petra!"

She joined him, eyes clouded with worry, "You don't think?"

Lukas cupped a hand towards his mouth, "Jesse! We're here, where are you?!"

There was a moment of nothing, save for the continuous drone of the volcano. Then-

"I heard swords," Petra said. She pointed to the hallway nearest to them ,"That way!"

They raced down the hall, hearts pounding and full of fear. There was a large door at the very end. On the other side of the door lava roared and spewed, mixed with the now clearer sound of weapons clashing.

Petra shoved it open and was the first through, "I see Jesse!" she cried.

Lukas quickly followed after, but immediately spotted someone other than Jesse, unmoving on the
floor, "Aiden!"

Petra was running across the large clearing, towards other side of the chasm where Jesse fought with Herobrine, "Help him! I'll get Jesse!

Lukas dashed across the space between, sliding to his knees as he approached the still male, "Aiden! It's me Lukas! Aiden get up!"

He scooped him up, the brunet hung limply in his arms. Each breath he made sounded labored and hoarse. He was pale, blood dripped from multiple punctures in his skin, staining his clothes. There was a grizzly slash on his back leg, dried with blood.

Lukas began to fall into a panic as his friend failed to respond or even awake, "Aiden! Wake up! Please!" he fought on tears, "Petra! He isn't waking up!"

Petra was by a ledge, trying to find a bridge, a beam, anything to get her across the flaming gap. "Is he breathing?"

"Barely!"

"Try CPR!"

"I don't know CPR!" Lukas cried.

Suddenly Petra cried out in horror. Lukas watched, as Herobrine took hold of Jesse's blade, flipped it around, and mercilessly impaled the youth with his own blade. An agonized wail tore forth from him and Jesse buckled into the blade. The sound wrenching Lukas's heart in two and he cried out for his friend, "Jesse!"

"JESSE!" Petra screamed.

Herobrine pulled Jesse closer, whispering something into Jesse's ear as he ran fingers through his hair. Jesse had fallen into complete shock, he had gone nearly ghostly white. His eyes wide as he feebly tried to remove the weapon. Herobrine finished his message, and with one vile kiss to Jesse's forehead, yanked the blade clean and free. Blood spilled everywhere, and Herobrine took a step back dropping the blade in disgust.

"JESSE!" Lukas cried again.

Petra was yelling every blasphemous word she could muster. Anything, everything, to get Herobrine to react.

But he simply ignored them.

Jesse stood a moment longer his lips moving weakly as he gasped for air. Bloodied fingers shakily clutched his wound. Then Jesse collapse like rag doll. His blood pooling on the ground beneath him in a black-red puddle.

"No!Jesse!"

Lukas forced himself to look away, back to Aiden. Hot tears burned his eyes, "Aiden I need you to wake up!" he begged. "We need your help right now! Aiden, please!"

Petra was still screaming at the Immortal, "You heartless ass! You bastard! You mother fu-"

Herobrine finally addressed her, "You'll join him in a moment love," he said simply, "But I currently
have bigger fish to fry at the moment."

Lukas looked at the demon of a man and swore there was something about Herobrine that had changed. He looked bolder, **stronger**. There was something different, and despite the intense heat of the atmosphere, Lukas felt cold.

"HEROBRINE!" a voice roared.

The addressed tilted his head and turned away from Lukas and Petra smiling, "Speak of the devil."

Steve flew down from above, through the mouth of the volcano. He shot down and landed hard on Herobrine's side of the divide. The ground collapsed upon impact, creating a small crater where he touched down. Steve stepped out of his hole, his diamond sword already drawn, eyes blazing in fury.

"Where are they?!" He demanded, the entire mountain shaking.

Herobrine crossed his arms, "That's not a proper greeting Steven."

Steve's eyes flashing in an unparalleled rage."Tell me NOW!"

Herobrine sighed, "Fine," he pointed towards Petra and Lukas, "There, there, and," then he pointed behind him, "There." he smiled, teeth glinting in the fire light, "You've had this coming a long time Steve, it's a cruel irony that it had to be him."

Steve glanced over Herobrine, his face morphing into absolute horror and despair, "JESSE!" he turned his focus back to his corrupt brother. "Get out of my way!"

Herobrine summoned a sword out of the volcanic air - the blackest diamond sword Lukas had ever seen- and pointed it at Steve, "Make me move, almighty First."

Steve snarled and lunged, Herobrine launching off as well. Their swords made contact and a powerful wave of air and sparks flew from the point of impact.

Lukas bent over Aiden to protect him from the debris, his body buffeted by the strong air currents. Petra actually stumbled backwards past him by the sheer force of it, but managed to stay on her feet.

She cursed, "Herobrine isn't going to let Steve get to Jesse! Lukas we have to get across!"

"How-" Lukas flinched as the entire mountain shook, "We can't with the lava. Aiden still isn't-"

Herobrine grabbed Steve by the shoulder, nails digging into the other's flesh. He hurled his brother with a roar, sending Steve flying into a pile of jagged debris. Then using whatever power that was now in his command, Herobrine dislodged stone from above and sent it crashing down onto the First.

Steve cried out in pain as a sharp support beam sliced his upper arm. He leapt out of the pile, stumbling a little as he landed. He clutched his wounded limb, the blood oozing through his fingers.

He didn't heal.

Lukas's heart was pounding, internal gears turning in confusion. Why wasn't he healing? Steve was hurt worse at the Gate, why now wasn't he healing?!?

Herobrine whistled, examining his own sword free hand and wiggling his fingers a bit. "And to think, the kid just had all this power sitting in him and he didn't even use it! Tsk!" He extended his hand, "Who knew the Witherstorm had this much potential!"
Lukas's eyes widened, *the Witherstorm*?!

"How does he know about that?" Petra gasped from behind him, "Is that why he was after Jesse?"

Lukas didn't know how to answer.

Steve snarled and made another attempt to get at Jesse, he was starting to look desperate. He looked to the fallen teen with a strange panic in his eyes.

Herobrine laughed, tearing up more rock from various parts of the ceiling and hurling it at Steve. Steve responded in kind by swinging his blade, slicing through the incoming projectiles with a wave of condensed air.

The Dark Immortal ran under the damage bringing his sword in an upward slice, fire pouring forth from the blade. Steve blocked, but only barely. He shoved Herobrine back. The significantly more energized brother landed on his hands, and kicked back, hitting Steve square in the chest.

Herobrine was stronger, he was faster. Lukas now knew it had something to do with the Witherstorm and he had taken it from Jesse.

Steve flew backward crashing into a wall before falling onto his knees, panting. He took a desperate look at Jesse and shakily got up.

"Come on Steve!" Petra called, "You can win!" she said more quietly to herself, "He has to win..."

Herobrine planted himself between the set, "Why bother?" he scoffed, "Just look at your handiwork brother," He gestured to Jesse, "Look at the result of your weakness."

Steve growled, blue eyes flashing. He made a dash-

Herobrine summoned obsidian up from the depths of the earth with a wave of his hand, blocking his opponent's path and shoving him back. "Weak" he muttered.

"Get out of my way!" Steve roared.

"You can do nothing!" Herobrine yelled back, "You are weak Steven! You couldn't protect him back then, and you can't save him now!"

Lukas looked to Petra, seeing her own confusion at Herobrine's words.

What did he mean...'back then'? 

"You have been so busy bonding with the mortals and living the blissful lie that you are one of them, that you have become weak! The god could have saved him Steven! But you just had to be the man!"

Something happened to Steve's expression, some sort of snap. He looked down at the floor, hands clenching tight.

"Now you can't even avenge him! Be a god brother! Avenge Jesse where the human can't!"

Herobrine sneered.

"You want a god?" Steve snarled through gritted teeth.

Mt. Incendia shook.
Lukas stared in fear as Steve's skin began to crack like ice, pieces of it peeling off and flying away in the air currents of the volcano. Underneath the torn skin was not blood or muscle. Instead it looked as if the heavenly bodies above were spreading across Steve's form. "You want a god?!" he repeated, louder this time.

Steve looked up, his expression one of undescrivable fury, "Fine! You'll get your god!" he spat.

Lukas and Petra stared in horror as the whites of Steve's eyes turned void black, the blazing blue irises there for only a moment before they too vanished into nothing.

"You'll get a VENGEFUL GOD!" Steve roared. His hands and sword going aflame, swirling around him in a fiery tornado.

Herobrine's smiled indicated that was exactly what he wanted.

Steve lunged and Herobrine leapt to meet him-

"Petra! Cover your ears!"

Before Lukas could turn around he felt Petra dropping down behind him, leaning against his back. Alex landed directly in front of him. "Alex-

"Cover your friend's ears!" she cried.

Lukas hastily tucked Aiden against his chest, placing a hand over his exposed ear.

Alex leaned into him, keeping Aiden pinned between Lukas and her as she covered Lukas's own ears with her hands.

"Hang on!" she cried.

"What about Jesse-" Petra began just as Steve and Herobrine made contact.

The impact that followed was explosive, fire and air pouring forth from the two blades and the sound
that came after was deafening.

Lukas barely heard Petra cry out in surprise even as close as she was leaning into him.

Oh Notch Jesse!

His eyes shifted to the fallen teen, only to spot some sort of magical barrier covering his limp body. It seemed to deflect both the debris and the sound. He could see a glow coming Alex's hands, she must be protecting him somehow.

Alex screamed in pain, fire and rock raining down upon her. She took the bulk of the shockwave, protecting the three youths the best she could.

"ALEX!"

Herobrine launched suddenly up, taking the battle to another floor. Steve- still in a enraged state, his form rapidly becoming less human- gave chase.

Alex shakily pulled away, there was blood oozing out of her ears, the gale had torn her hair tie off, leaving the thick locks pooling around her shoulders.

Lukas's ears were ringing, and his tears flowed faster trying to get dirt from his eyes.

"Alex!" Petra reached out tears in her own eyes, "Alex are you okay?!"

"I'm fine," The woman said, "Are you two alright?"

Lukas fought a fresh wave of tears, "W-we're okay. But Jesse and Aiden-"

"Let me look,"

"Alex- Alex- Herobrine he-"

"I know," Alex's voice cracked slightly.

Lukas flinched as Steve went smashing through a wall, grabbing a metal beam and hurling it at Herobrine.

There was no control in Steve, no calm and collected warrior that Lukas had seen slay a giant spawn. There was only rage, pure, unbridled immortal rage. He wasn't human anymore.

Alex looked briefly over her shoulder, eyes flashing in despair at the sight of her husband, "No, no, no," she quickly went back to Aiden.

"What's wrong with him?" Petra said.

"He's fallen into a form which the mortals called the Deity State, or the God Mode. When it's induced through a powerful negative emotion we lose control of our power and all coordination. Herobrine wants him to be like this and unless we get him out of it-" She curses.

"What?!"

"Asphyciation torture." She gingerly placed a hand on Aiden's chest, "He has volcanic fumes stuck in his lungs."

"Oh G-god's" Lukas hastily wiped away tears, "Can we- will he-"
"No, he's slowly suffocating from the poison."

"Alex, please!" Petra pressed, "We have to be able to do something!"

"I can do something," Alex soothed, "Hold him steady for me."

Alex placed her hand flatly on Aiden's chest. Her eyes, like Steve washed out to a blank slate. Hers however was a soft white glow. She slowly pulled her hand away from Aiden's chest, keeping her palm flat and level.

"Lqrnm xo cqan oran jwm cqan jra, R xamna hxd cx xknh vn! " Alex said in a strange alien voice. "Lxvn oxacq!"

Suddenly black vapors poured out from Aiden's mouth, but Alex didn't stop pulling her hand back till they ceased. Then the fumes rose up and joined the rest of the volcano's smoke in departing towards the sky.

Alex's eyes returned their normal vibrant green and she lowered her arm. She leaned back just as Aiden's eyes shot open with a gasp. He lurched forward in Lukas's arms, screaming.

"Aiden!"

His eyes were wild, and he struggled in panic, still mentally trapped in whatever torture Herobrine had inflicted.

Lukas held firm, "Aiden! Aiden calm down! Aiden it's okay! It's me!"

The glaze in his eyes cleared, and Aiden coughed and wheezed against him; finally going slack. "L-Lukas?" he asked voice hoarse.

"Y-yeah," he managed to respond tearfully, "It's okay, you're okay."

Alex stood, "Petra, you and Lukas get him out of here. I'll get Jesse." She turned, then taking a running dash and one big bound, Alex crossed the wide gap that was the ravine.

Aiden was looking around still dazed and confused, "What- where? Ouch!" he cringed suddenly, "Lukas?"

"Yes?" he replied, worried.

Pain had cut through Aiden's delirium and he wiggled against him, "That hurts, please stop squeezing me."

Lukas loosened his grip, Aiden coughing violently beneath him. "I'm sorry! I thought you were gone! What happened to you?!"

"I don't remember much, there was this storm and- the wall blew up. Then I was somewhere else and Herobrine he-" Aiden suddenly jerked upright, nearly colliding foreheads with Lukas, "Wait! Jesse-"

"He's hurt bad," Petra cut in, "Alex is with him right now. She's the Healer, she can save him. Steve and Alex are the Immortals! They-"

Alex was assembling a bandage at that very moment. She had torn off one of her long sleeves, trying her best to prevent Jesse's grizzly wound from bleeding further.
Aiden shook his head urgently, still trying to force out words between his coughing, "No! They're in danger! He-

There was a loud crash as the floor lurched. The trio looked over right as Herobrine sent Steve flying through a support pillar. Steve fell hard the entire balcony above him crashing down onto him.

Herobrine was wounded in various places; Steve had still managed to get a few hits in despite his degrading form. But unlike Steve, Herobrine didn't seem hindered by them yet.

Alex looked up from her tending of Jesse. Rage flashed through her eyes, and her skin cracked slightly in some places. But she quickly recovered. She went back to Jesse, refusing to move away from the dying youth.

Herobrine rolled his shoulders and turned away from the wreckage with a still buried Steve, he looked to her, "You're turn."

Alex didn't move.

"No point in trying Alex, he's good as gone."

She kept working, but a sword summoned in the air, hovering by her head. "Stay the fu-"

Herobrine lunged at her, faster than a blur. Alex shot up, blocking his first attack by grabbing her floating blade. Herobrine spun around her, bringing his sword down towards Jesse's unmoving form.

"NO!" Alex snapped up her leg, kicking her enemy in the side of the skull. She then slammed her forehead into his nose, sending him stumbling back. He came again, and she spun around herself once again kicking out her foot, this time hitting Herobrine in the jaw, dislocating it.

Herobrine snarled and the volcano rumbled in kind, he took a step back, and casually popped his jaw back into place.

"You're not going to take him a second time," Alex snarled.

Herobrine chuckled, "Oh Alexis, "he crouched, "I already took him." He lunged, catching the woman in her midsection and together they crashed into the far wall.

Petra's eyes were wide with shock, "Lukas! He's faster!"

"I- I know- I-"

Herobrine came out first, looking unscathed. Alex followed after, her sword already swinging. She had blood drizzling down her forehead, and she looked very close to slipping into her own aggressive deity state. "You bastard!"

As the pair dueled, Steve forced himself out of his pile of rubble. For a moment there, his god like form ebbed away. He made another running sprint for Jesse-

Herobrine shoved off Alex, and swung his blade down at Steve, the latter barely able to block in time. He went to his knees, the floor caving slightly under the immense power.

"Herobrine couldn't handle them both before, he retreated! I don't understand!" Petra got up.

Lukas stood as well, pulling Aiden up with him, "He's keeping them away from Jesse! We have to help him!"
"We have to get across first!"

"I know! But how?!"

Aiden piped up, "How much stuff do you guys have on you? Building stuff?"

"What are you aiming at," Lukas asks.

Aiden took a few struggling breaths, then, "We find a narrow point, then," he cringed, clutching his throat.

"Yeah?"

"We build a bridge."

Chapter End Notes

Art by:Luna Destiny
"We build a bridge."

Petra looked sharply at him. The heat from the volcano left her sweaty, her hair plastered to her face. It hardly moved from her sudden movement, "How are we going to do that Aiden? The building works differently here. Any kind a bridge we make will collapse under its own weight without support."

Lukas stumbled as the ground shook, "These tremors won't help either! We'll fall before we can put a block down!" he cursed.

"Do you guys have stone?" Aiden asked.

"No,"

"What do you have?" he paused, "Do you have any wood?"

"I have some blocks," Petra said, "Not a lot."

"The rooms back in the dining hall had some wooden supports," Lukas said, "We can use those too."

"But even that wood might collapse, that and there is the lava." Petra cringes.

Aiden takes a deep breath, "Then we make sticks, and make a ladder instead."

"A ladder?!"

"It should be sturdy enough to hold us, and if we build it up and drop it across at the narrow part," He pointed towards the gap. Not far from where Jesse lay, the cavern was narrower there. Not small enough to jump across by far, but possibly small enough to go with the ladder plan. "Then we run across and get Jesse."

Petra and Lukas looked to the drop as well, just a massive geyser of lava spewed up.

Aiden swallowed thickly, "Look, unless either of you has another idea-"

Petra held up her hand, "We don't. And we don't have time to find another way around. We'll build that ladder, it's the best chance we have."

"We can't go all at once." Lukas said hastily, already moving towards the dining hall.

"If we go one at a time, we should be fine," Aiden said, "You guys go get more wood! I have enough on me to build a crafting table! Go!"

Lukas and Petra darted through the door, vanishing into the dark.

Aiden ducked out of instinct as another loud bang shook the city. He looked, watching cautiously as Steve and Alex blocked and parried to the best of their abilities. Herobrine's continuous onslaught giving the pair no quarter; no time to stop and help Jesse.

Aiden ran towards -what he hoped was a safer area - and closer to the gap and Jesse. His lungs burned as he ran, and he didn't even want to think about his other bodily pains. But he didn't have
time to think anyway.

They were running out of time.

He quickly assembled the crafting table, praying it was in a place where it wouldn't -hopefully- be destroyed. But there were no limits to where the Immortals could go, there was no sign or warning.

Aiden flinched again at another explosive bang. Fire flew out of the canyon, slamming into a wall. He thought he could hear Alex scream, but he couldn't figure if it was pain or rage.

Each hit the trio dealt, each blow, would have killed a normal person. But this was a battle of super humans. Aiden looked grimly out, seeing Steve's glowing form. Even Alex was willingly shifting into a more deity like state, her final card against Herobrine.

This was a battle of gods.

Just like what the journal described, all those ages ago.

"We got more blocks and sticks!" Lukas ran up panting, his knuckles are bloodied, he had been punching hard and fast.

Petra's knuckles are bloody too, "Notch be willing this is enough."

"No time to second guess!"

They built and assembled the pieces as fast as they could manage in the chaotic environment. The heavy thought that their friend was running out of time was a good motivator. Every second lost was another second Jesse might be gone.

At one point Steve crashed down on their side, right into the ancient palace. What windows remained shattered, scattering small shards of glass everywhere. The entire upper floor falling down upon the First. He shot out like a streak of light, he hit Herobrine dead on. The pair flew out of the mouth of the volcano only to come crashing back down moments later. An entire section of the canyon gave way to the inferno as a result.

The city was caving in on itself.

"Go hurry!"

"Steady! We can't let it break!"

The ladder tipped, and landed on the other side with about a foot to spare. It was long enough.

"Hurry!" Petra moved forward.

"Wait!" Aiden grabbed her shoulder, "I'll go first!"

"But."

"This is my crazy idea, if it breaks with me on it; we know it was a bad one. Besides, I'm the heaviest out of the three of us; so if the ladder can hold me, it will hold you two."

Petra hesitated, then slowly nodded. She reluctantly backed away and off of the first rung. "Be careful." she whispered.

Aiden took an uneasy step onto the first bar over the fifteen story drop. Lukas and Petra held their
end down to stabilize the build. But with nothing holding the other end, every shake, tremor, and shudder of the volcano had the ladder bouncing and lurching.

Alex flew over it, the whole thing nearly flipped over by the wind that followed.

Aiden dropped on to his hands and knees. Walking across on two feet was a guaranteed death.

Fire and lava spewed up around him, the heat was unbearable. He refused to look down, he'd lose his nerve if he did, and they were already strained enough. He feared one wrong move from the Immortals would send the already weak ledge to the fire below; with the ladder and Aiden falling with-

No, don't think that. Don't even go there! Just...look up, keep looking up. You have to do this, just look up. He focused on Jesse. The male lay still on the stone, red in his own blood. With all the tremors it was hard to discern if he was still breathing. His head was turned away, entire body twisted in an awkward angle.

He had to live, he just had too.

"Hang in there Jesse, we're coming..."

The battle was violently escalating, even though Aiden felt it was bad enough it was certainly getting worse. Herobrine was stronger now with the power of the Witherstorm and he was using it to his advantage. Steve and Alex were now losing, even at their most powerful state, they couldn't hold him for long.

The ladder lurched and Aiden's grip slipped. He lost his footing sending his lower body through the ladder. He managed to stop himself before he fell any further, ribs slamming against the wooden poles.

"Aiden!" Lukas cried.

"I'm okay!" he yelled. I think, he added mentally.

Lava spewed up from below, and he swore he could feel the heat melting the rubber on his boots. Aiden pulled himself up, hastening his snail pace across the bridge.

Steve landed by the ladder, and the whole edge groaned under his impact.

Aiden froze, a gasp escaping his lips.

Steve's head turned quicker than a snap, his iris-less eyes burrowing into Aiden's soul. But just as quickly as he looked at Aiden, his god-like rage snuffed out, and Steve's eyes cleared. He looked at Aiden, precariously balanced on the home-made bridge. Then he looked to Jesse distressed, before looking back to Aiden. Steve's eyes widened in surprise, catching on to was the trio was doing. He gave Aiden a sharp quick nod in understanding. Steve then leapt away, careful not to damage the floor.

He was still in his deity state, but the blind rage that had guided him was gone. He quickly joined Alex, and almost immediately their stance changed from offensive to defensive. It was easier to hold off then to push forward. They were keeping Herobrine back Aiden realized, and away from Jesse.

Aiden began to move once more, when a large geyser shot up from below. It missed the ladder, but the heat wave and gust of air knocked Aiden clean off the wooden bridge.
"AIDEN!"

His bloody hands caught the side of the ladder, and his shoulders screamed in agony as his whole body jerked from the sudden stop. Aiden screamed in kind, more from fear and terror than anything.

Petra was already getting onto the ladder, "Hang on! I'm coming!"

"No! It'll break!"

"But you'll fall!" She yelled desperately.

Aiden cried, "Just wait! I'm okay!"

With shaking hands he tried to pull himself up. But the air currents buffeting him around make it impossible to do anything but just hold on. Even with Lukas and Petra's attempts to keep the ladder steady he couldn't get up. So Aiden moved his hands to the middle of the rungs. Then, one hand at a time, bar by bar, he keeps moving.

It kills his hands; the blood and sweat make it difficult to grip the ladder. It's like monkey bars, he has to tell himself. Granted, that was something he hadn't done since he was small. Down below the lava bubbled and boiled, like nature was whispering to him. Sending him a morbid invitation to just let go and join the inferno.

Monkey bars, it is just like monkey bars. But death is involved-

No! Just keep moving!

The ongoing battle makes it even more difficult to stay alive and focused. Everytime Herobrine, Alex and Steve meet, the entire city threatens to give out from the violent air currents of fire and air. Stone, iron, even obsidian gives out upon the violent impacts from the three warriors. How many hits were left till everything just gave up?

But Aiden, by some miracle makes it to the edge, the currents of air are weaker against the rock face. His shoulders and hands are screaming, he's pretty sure they're about to give out any second now.

Just keep climbing.

"Aiden hang on!" Lukas cries, "You're almost there!"

Aiden doesn't respond, he is fighting for friction with his boots, pushing off the rock, anything to help him up. Aiden claws at the stone, finally able to pull himself up and over. He collapses on the ground, his already hurting lungs heaving for air. He felt like he could sleep for eternity, like he had trekked a mountain and not crossed a gap.

No time to rest though!

Aiden sits up, and repositioned himself over the ladder's end. His weight making it significantly more stable.

"GO!"

Petra doesn't waste a second, crawling across as fast as she can. "Jesse?" she calls, fear etching her face.

Aiden looks back over his shoulder. Now closer, he can clearly see Jesse's weak and unsteady breathing. "He doesn't have a lot of time Petra! Hurry!"
She does hurry, "I'm coming!" she crosses faster than he does, the stability of the ladder helping her greatly.

"Help Jesse," Aiden says as she steps onto more solid ground. "I got the ladder!"

"Got it!"

Aiden looks across the chasm once more, "Your turn man!"

Lukas climbs up, gripping tight as the ladder now loses some of its craved stability. Lukas is more nimble than Aiden however, and his archer fingers are used to gripping tight.

Suddenly-

"I don't think so!" Herobrine roars.

He'd seen them!

"Nooo!" Alex cries.

Aiden watches in horror as Herobrine kicks Steve hard, sending the man flying across the gap. He hit the other side, sending a great length of ravine edge crumbling under impact. Steve falls with the rest of the debris, the ladder losing is ground as well and falling along with everything else.

"Lukas!" Petra cries out.

"Shit! NOOO!" Aiden holds on tightly as he can as the other end plummets, "Lukas!" he screams.

Lukas was screaming as the ladder drops, but by some miracle he manages to hang on as it smashed into the wall. His head hits the rock, but he still holds on, "Augh!" blood immediately began to run down the right side of his face. It moved quickly, mixing with the sweat on his skin.

"Lukas!" Aiden cries again. By some greater miracle he has managed to keep his own grip. Barely holding both the former bridge and Lukas from plummeting below, "Lukas hang on!"

Lukas made the mistake of looking down at the inferno, "Oh Notch! Don't let go!"

"Climb Lukas! Climb!"

Lukas scrambles up, threatening to fall everytime the ladder bangs against the rock face. The stone smashes against his fingers making the youth cry out in pain. The much stronger stone is cracking the wood with each hit, it's going to break.

"You're almost to the top!" Aiden urges, "Just a little-"

The ladder shatters in Aiden's hands.

"LUKAS!"

Lukas jumps before his bar breaks, and Aiden lunges his upper body over the edge, arm reaching out. Their hands locked together just as the ladder tumbles into the lava rivers below. The shattered wood hits the fire, some of them shooting back up with a geyser, flying like large arrows through the air.

"I gotcha! Don't let go!" He begs. Their blood and sweat mix together and Aiden can feel Lukas struggling for grip, "Don't let go!"
Lukas grabs on with both hands, and manages to pull himself closer. Aiden grabs onto the blond's shirt, yanking hard. The other manages to get over without pulling Aiden off the cliff and they both collapse onto the ground wheezing.

"Jesse!"

They sat up, looking towards Petra. She urgently shook the still brunet. "Jesse come on man!" Tears peaked out from the corner of her eyes, "Guys! Guys! He's not breathing!"

The boys scramble over, "Anyone know CPR?" Aiden asks.

"I do!" Petra chokes out.

"Then do it! Lukas hold his head! I'm going to try and bind his wound!"

They took position, Aiden was opposite of Petra, careful to stay out of her way. Lukas settled at the top, resting Jesse's head onto his knees. Aiden looked down at Jesse's stomach, his own twisting in pain.

He needed to bind it and fast.

He looked at his sleeve, but hesitated at the sight of all the blood and sweat staining his clothes.

Aiden heard the tearing of fabric and he looked up. Lukas had taken off his coat and was tearing at his shirt. His long sleeves much cleaner and less sweaty then Aiden's. He just finished tearing off the second sleeve, "Here," he shoves the fabric to Aiden with shaking hands.

"Come on Jesse, come on!" Petra kept doing CPR, but her demeanor was beginning to crumble, "COME ON!"

Aiden looked at the wound in despair, then took a deep breath and started working. "Wake up you idiot," he choked out, hastening to stop the blood.

Jesse didn't stir.

He was starting to cry, he tried hard not to, but he began crying anyway. Aiden found he was crying over the most annoying person in his entire life. The one person who had been the target of almost every cruel thing he ever did or said...

Aiden was crying over the first person to have given him a chance.

Aiden swallowed hard and squeezed a limp hand, "I did not kick you off a damn floating city for you to die this way! If I can't kill you doing that...Then- then you are not allowed to die here! Please, Jesse! Please wake up!"

"Please wake up!"

For a moment, there seemed to be a thousand voices, echoes of a thousand worlds.

Then there was nothing...

But only for a moment.

"He's drooling..."
"He's tired, give him a break."

"Someone give me a marker."

"Shhh! No, let Jesse sleep."

Jesse shifted.

"See? You're too noisy! Come on, let's leave him be!"

Jesse unwillingly let his eyes flutter open, a soft sigh escaping his lips. As his vision came into focus a white pillow greeted him. He could feel the soft and cozy cotton sheets covering his body. He didn't have his armor on, not even his suspenders, Jesse's shirt just loosely and casually hung on his shoulders and he was strangely okay with that. He was in the most comfortable bed ever and he didn't want to leave.

"When do you think he'll get up?"

"Shhh! Just hand me the cards!"

He was groggy, and tired, not yet bothered by the strange whispers. Not getting off the pillow, Jesse began to slowly take the time to inspect his surroundings. The first thing he noticed was the room was made of wood. It was entirely open, it seemed to be just a one roomed house.

There was bookcase, a trunk, and a empty armor rack. There were even posters on the wall.

*Like home, Jesse thought amused, This looks like home.*

A cool breeze cut through the room, a perfect sensation to match the comfort of the bed. Then the smell of oak and pine trees drifted into the room.

Jesse looked over his shoulder at a window by the bed. The bright sunlight made it impossible to see outside, but he could hear the branches brushing against the walls.

Just like the treehouse.

His looked back forward, his eyes drifting downward. He eyed a patch of scuff marks scarring the wooden floor. It made Jesse smile. *That's funny, Reuben did the exact same thing to the floor when I-*

Jesse's smile drops.

The perfect bed, *his bed*. The one room house, *his home*.

He's wide awake now and trying to move. His body is covered in a aching pain, but he manages to gingerly sit up. Once upright he takes a good look to confirm...He's home.

The treehouse?!

"Hey! He's up! Morning zombie head!"

Jesse sharply turns his head and his heart stops.

Axel is sitting at the table, the one built into the wall - just like home. He wave, smiling broadly at Jesse. Olivia is on the opposite side, shaking her head in disapproval, *"I told you we were being too noisy. Now we've gone and woke him up."* She gives him an apologetic look. Then she shuffles the deck of cards in her hands and smiles at Jesse, *"Sorry Jesse. Did you have a nice nap?"*
Jesse is speechless.

Aiden leans over to Olivia, "He's slow to wake up remember? Talk slowly."

Olivia snorts and gently smacks Axel's arms, "Stop that."

"Do you think if I put on my creeper costume he'll wake up faster?"

"Axel! Shh!"

Jesse swallows, then he does it again, then a third time. His throat his thick and tight, and his mouth is dry, "G-guys?" his voice was hoarse, the sound made him cringe.

Axel grins wider, "There he goes."

"Axel? Olivia?"

"That's our names dude, don't wear it out."

"I-I'm- we- the treehouse?"

Olivia looks around, "I know it has been awhile since we hung out here, but yeah...the treehouse." she tilts her head, a little worried, "Are you okay? You seem a little out of it right now."

Jesse looked down at the sheets, the fabric is bunching in his shaking hands. He tries to remember how he got here, how he got home, but..."I'm dead."

"Mmmm, don't think so," Axel replies, "Cause if you're dead, we shouldn't be here. Reuben would be though and that would be awesome!" he brings his hands to his chin, "Unless we're all dead, I guess that means we have more time to hang out."

"Axel..." Olivia sighs.

"Then-then I'm dreaming," Jesse mumbles.

"But what if we're the ones who are dreaming and you are the dream?"

"Axel cut it out, can't you see he's tired?" Olivia turns to Jesse, "How about a nice game of cards to wake you up? Crazy Eights is your favorite right?" she shuffled the cards, "Here, I'll deal you in."

Jesse stared across the room, his two friends chatting merrily away as the cards were dealt across the table.

He was here, he was home. This was his house, his table, his best friends were right there. They were right-

A wet drop splashed on the back of his hand, then another.

Olivia finished dealing, "Alright which pile do you - Jesse?!"

His friends stared in alarm as Jesse began to openly cry.

"Dude what's wrong?!"

"You can't be here," Jesse choked on his own words, "I can't be home. This isn't - this isn't-" he couldn't look at them; he buried his face into his knees. He wanted so badly to curl up and die.
They left the table - cards forgotten - and scrambled onto the bed. Olivia got there first, placing a hand on his shoulder, "Jesse, Shhh, it's okay!"

"It's not! You're not real!"

"Whatever you think this is," she soothes, "We're still here for you. Tell us what is wrong."

"I can't get to you!" Jesse sobbed, his tears soaking the fabric, "I'm trying but I can't!"

"We know you are," Axel replied, unnaturally quiet.

"No, you don't!" Jesse lifted his head, "I left, I didn't tell you where I was going and- and - Now I can't get back! I just left you - I wish - I just wish you knew!"

"We might not know where you are Jesse," Olivia admitted. "But we do know you. We know you're trying."

Jesse didn't respond, he just shook his head. Weeks, months, of pent up emotion, and he can't keep it in any longer. His mind is broken.

"If anyone can make it back, you can man." Axel said.

"I can't. I can't keep going."

"Dude, you are a lot stronger than you give yourself credit for."

"I can't..."

They weren't real, they were not here. But Jesse wanted so badly-

"I miss you guys so much!" He sobbed.

"We miss you too," Olivia replied softly.

"We miss you bad." Axel added.

"We miss you bad." Axel added.

"But Jesse? We need to talk." Olivia rubbed his back, "You can let Petra, Ivor and Lukas help you know. They're good friends, they can be there for you just as much as we were for each other."

"What?"

"Jesse," Axel elbowed him gently, "We know you, and well, ever since you lost Reuben you've been pulling a lot on your own. Wherever you guys are right now, you've probably clammed up and you're carrying all the weight. Let them help man."

Jesse rubbed his eyes, sniffing, "I want to. I just- People get hurt and -" He rubbed his eyes harder, "And what if you guys feel-"

Axel lifted an eyebrow, "Feel what? Feel replaced?" he scoffed, "Not gonna happen. No offense to Lukas, but pretty boy has got nothin on me."

Jesse let out a choked laugh, Notch that sounded so much like Axel.

Olivia smiled, "Will you let them help? It'll get you home faster."

"I'll...try."
"Good!" Axel patted him on the back, "You'll be back in no time. Now come 'er! Group hug!"

Axel pulls the others into one of his lung crushing hugs. Olivia laughs as she tumbles into Jesse. She wraps around him with her warm arms. It's smothering, and tight, and even breathing is hard.

It's perfect.

Jesse laughs, or maybe he's just crying harder. But he revels in the embrace, clinging to his friends, his family. He savors the warmth, because it feels so real, it feels so much like them.

He doesn't want to let go.

"It's not working!"

Petra's composure has crumbled, Aiden's never seen her cry. She's trying, but her sobs make her efforts to revive Jesse difficult.

"Keep trying!" Lukas begs, "Petra, keep trying!"

"I am!"

"Come on Jesse! Please! Wake up!"

Aiden has never prayed to Notch before, but he is now. Hoping the deity that meant so much to this world was listening. Just once, please just once.

Notch help him please!

Jesse remains unresponsive and Aiden tries not to scream.

"Wake up!"
"Oh Notch they just keep coming!"
"They're coming from the forest!"
"Hold the fire line!"

Reggie stuck his head into the blacksmith shop, "Ivor I need more of that Greek Fire of yours!"
Ivor growled, "We're running out of ingredients, there is no more Greek Fire!"
"Then what have you got?"

Ivor ran his hands over the dozens of bottles, "Poison,"
"That will work just fine," Reginald said, catching a bottle as Ivor threw one to him. "I'll be back!"
"Be careful!"

Reggie stabs an armored zombie that shot out from the shadows, "Woah! I can't keep any promises!"

Bach comes by, smashing a fairly large spider spawn with his war hammer. The creature crumples under the weight of the weapon, blood and other fluids splattering the ground. "We'll give them what's coming!" The blacksmith roared as he and Reginald departed for the main battle.

"Heaven help us," At the window, Bach's wife Mariah looked worriedly to the mountain, "I pray to Notch they are alright." Ivor had told her about Jesse and the others. "Expecting a child of my own I can only imagine..."

"I've seen them do some incredible things," Ivor encouraged, though he too was worried. "And if your Immortals are as powerful as the books say-"

"The Dark One is not like any enemy ever faced Ivor," Mariah cut in softly, she placed a shaking hand on her pregnant stomach, "He is the nightmare we fear in our sleep, the darkness we flee from, the secret that we must never speak off. If Steve and Alex fail, if they fall in that mountain, they fall for good."

"What do you mean-"

Someone screamed in the night, a high pitched wail. Two females rushed past the door. Ivor knows one of them; she was hastily introduced earlier as Eliza. The other was young girl about Jesse's age, long blonde hair. Her flower crown was in disarray as she wielded a weapon.

"They've gotten past the forest gate!" Eliza gasps.
"How many are there?!

"Hundreds, Mariah, in all my years," the scholar shakes her head, "I've never seen this before!"
"Any sign of Steve and Alex?"
"No, I saw Alex go by earlier towards Incendia but-"
There was a loud deafening boom, and hundreds of people screamed and ducked in terror. Ivor got up, joining Mariah at the window.

Mt. Incendia burned and shook in the night, two blue green streaks of light flew from the mouth of the smoking mountain, illuminating the dark blackness. They flashed and warped around a darker red hue, then they shot rapidly down back into the fiery heart of the volcano.

There was another loud boom, the ground shook, and the spawns shrieked in the night.

"Oh dear Notch, protect them." Mariah whispered. She clutched her stomach and began to cry, "Protect your creations please!"

Ivor look up there as well, and found he too prayed to Notch.

_Kids._

_Notch let them be okay._

Jesse lay curled up in the bed. His friends long since vanished from his dream. The moment he had opened his eyes again, they had already gone.

The dream had ended.

So he lay there, face buried in the blankets for what feels like an eternity. But maybe it has only been a few seconds, he's really not sure. He lays there, numbly staring at the wall and taking in the subtle sounds drifting in from beyond the treehouse walls.

There are so many voices, so many whispers.

Jesse remembers more now. There was fire and _pain_, then the darkness pulled him away. He concludes that's why he's here, stuck in this place. In a delusion, in a _memory._

"You have wonderful friends."

Jesse weakly lifts his head, his teary vision making it difficult to see at first. Everything is blurry but a few blinks and the room clears back up.

There is a older gentleman seated at the table. He's calmly picking up the cards that Olivia and Axel had abandoned. He's bald, but sports dark black facial hair in a long healthy beard. His dark eyes sparkle with youthful delight, but they are also wise and soft. He smiles at Jesse, giving off an almost grandfather like feeling. "They're very close to you."

Jesse's not as surprised to see someone here as he was before. He doesn't really feel like addressing it though. So Jesse simply nods at his latest illusion.

"How are you feeling?"

Jesse shrugs, honestly he feels emotionally overwhelmed, his mind is ready to snap. _Like a frayed bowstring, I'll break if this keeps up_, He thinks bitterly.

"Perfectly understandable considering the situation," the old man hums.

The youth raises an eyebrow, startled. He didn't recall speaking that out loud. But maybe he did.....Did he?
"No you didn't."

Interested, Jesse sits up, and rubs his nose, wipes away a stray tear and then finally speaks, "You can read them -my thoughts- because you're not real. You know everything I know."

"If you insist."

Jesse frowns, eyeing the older male again, he doesn't look like anyone Jesse's ever met before. His voice feels familiar but he still can't place it, "I don't think we've met," Jesse says slowly.

"Not personally no," the elder replies, "But I've known you for a very long time." He gestures to the seat across the table, "Join me?"

"I don't really feel like playing cards."

"Are you sure?" We have a lot to talk about, it will be a good way to help each other relax."

"Who are you?" Jesse asks.

"A friend."

Jesse frowns.

The other smiles like he knew what Jesse's reaction would be. He pats the table.

"It's just a dream. He's just a dream. This should be fine, right?"

Jesse though he feels a wave of distrust towards the stranger, there is an air about him that puts Jesse at ease. So Jesse reluctantly gets up and crosses the room, keeping his blankets around his shoulders.

The old man smiles brighter as Jesse slides into the bench on the opposite side of the table. He quickly deals out the cards, "Wonderful! Ever play Uno?"

"Never heard of it."

"You eliminate your cards into the center pile by using the same face or color. If you can't you have to draw from the deck till you are able to discard. Once you're down to one card, you have to call Uno before your opponent or you'll have to draw two more cards. Be the first person to empty your hand completely to win the game."

Jesse slowly grabs his pile.

"I'll begin," the male says as he goes first, "You don't trust me."

"Not really,"

"May I ask why?"

"Well," Jesse pauses to draw a few cards, then, "You're...Well - I'm having trust issues right now, and - Ugh, it's hard to explain. You are a product of my insanity and there really is no reason for me to be talking to you."

The other seemed unhindered by the "insanity" statement. He simply kept playing, "You feel hurt about Steve pushing you away like he did."

"How did-" Jesse is taken aback for a moment, then he nods. "He pushed me away and he wouldn't
tell me why. Turns out Steve and Alex weren't even who they said they claimed to be."

"What did they claim exactly?"

"They-" Jesse frowns, "Well really nothing, but they could have mentioned their immortality."

"Should they have been obligated to tell you?" he asked.

"Yes! I mean, no. I guess not..." Jess sniffed, "We really didn't know each other than long." in all his rage and hurt, Jesse had never really thought about it before. "I guess I didn't have the right to know. It's just...I really trusted them, I don't know why but-" Jesse set down his cards.

"You felt safe with them Jesse, I understand."

"Safer than I've been in a long time," Jesse admitted, "Steve helped me, unwind again. I could tell him anything it felt like. Maybe...maybe that's why it hurt so badly. I told them everything, and they...didn't."

It was so strange, talking to this unknown person. He was literally spilling everything that had piled up inside of him in the last three days. But it almost felt like he was talking to Steve. It just felt safe to do so, figment of his imagination aside.

"Did it ever occur to you, now especially that you know firsthand," the elder said, "That it might have been too dangerous for you to know."

Jesse hesitated, he hadn't actually. There had been a lot going-wait...

The male continued, "Steve and Alex are powerful - Uno- and they've made many enemies Jesse."

"It sounds like you know a lot about them."

"We've known each other a long time. Longer than you or anyone you've ever known has been around."

"Then how do you know me?"

"I've known you since you were born," the other smiled, "And I have watched you grow and learn all the way up to this point."

_Maybe...this was more than a dream._

Jesse leaned back, picking his cards back up, "You like to be vague don't you?"

"Just like you like to ask questions,"

"Can you answer one without sounding so mysterious?"

"Excluding that one, yes, I will do my best."

"Fine -Uno-" Jesse looked around, "Where am I and why were Olivia and Axel here?"

The other whistled, "Went straight for the big one, alright then." he drew a few cards, "To answer the later part, Olivia and Alex were here because I brought them here. You needed to see them. You needed something to strengthen your spirit against what is to come. It wasn't very difficult for me. Both of them were asleep. To them this will be a dream they won't recall when they awake."
"But the things they said-"

"I merely informed them that you were in need of comfort. What they said was stictly them," then he smiled, "They know you well."

Jesse hesitated, "Thank you...then?"

"It was my pleasure- blast this hand-" the elder huffed at his cards and rearranged them in his hands, "As for where you are, that is a bit more difficult to explain. But to put it as simply as possible- You are at a crossroads, a choice if you will. One pathway least to one place, one path leads to another. But it is only up to you were we go."

Jesse wanted to clutch his head and groan, "That doesn't make any sense at all."

"We are in your mind Jesse, and yet we are not. You are in place than very few have ever been or ever will be."

"That's not very simple."

"Well, treat it like a road then. You will either go left," the old man tilted his head towards the left, "Or you go right." he jabbed his head towards the window, "And you can't turn back."

Jesse looked out the window, to the sunny forest and flowers below. This wasn't the same woods his treehouse was usually in. There were so many different trees, and beyond the line was a long rolling prairie, full of wildflowers. And there were people, hundreds, thousands, no, perhaps millions. There were more people then Jesse had ever seen in his life. They went on forever, following the county to the horizon and beyond to blue oceans and white shores and more green country.

A paradise.

"This still doesn't tell me-" he drops his cards, staring at the small figure romping around in the grass outside. "I-is...that?"

"Yes,"

"Reuben!" Jesse stood, "I'll be right back!"

"Jesse wait!" The old man gently grabbed his hand. The motion freezing Jesse in place, "You must decide first, and carefully!"

"Just let me see him please, I'll be back in a -"

"If you go," the other whispered, "You can't come back in."

Jesse frowned, turning away, "What do you mean? I'll just-" Jesse paused mid gesture to the door on the treehouse floor.

On the other side of the room, a large oak door that hadn't been there before was inserted in the far wall. The wood was dark, almost black. It looked cold and uninviting. It didn't make sense, why would there be a door in the wall, when there was one already going down.

"When did that get there?"

"That is the choice."

Jesse slowly slid back down into the bench once more, blankets pooling around his lap. The old man
released his gently grip on his wrist. Jesse looked at the other, "I don't understand."

"Just think on it my child. What do you already know?"

"W-we're in my mind, but we're also not, according to you," Jesse bit his lip, "You said there was a choice. There are two doors now, and so that's what I have to pick. One goes outside, the other - I don't know where that goes. You said I can't go back?"

Jesse looked outside; Reuben was happily rolling in the tall grass, snorting in delight. He sighs, looking at his lost pal with affection, "The last time I saw Reuben...was after the Witherstorm's defeat. Then he-" Jesse stopped.

Oh.

The old man sighed, "Do you understand? Do you remember everything that happened to you now?"

Jesse suddenly does, he remembers the volcano, and Aiden, and that pain- his sword.

His hand slinks up underneath his shirt, and tenderly rests on his abdomen. Herobrine's foul words began infecting his memory. "You're not a figment of my imagination. This isn't a dream," he cringes, "I'm...dying."

"We are in your mind, but you are having an out of body experience," The elder nodded, "Whatever you decide next - no wrong answer mind you - will change everything."

Jesse looks away, trying not to cry, "What does it matter if I go back? I'm probably drowning in my own blood right now."

"Let me show you something."

The old man gestures back to the window. And Jesse watches was the frame fill with fog, slowly creating an image. There is the hot glow of lava, sparks and smog rising to the sky. He can see the moon- he is looking up.

"Jesse come on! Please!"

Startled Jesse sees Lukas come into picture, leaning over him.

He's a complete mess, sweat and grim on his face. Blood smears on the side of his skull. Lukas is crying. "Jesse wake up!" he begs. He looks off to another direction, "Aiden!"

The picture moves. Aiden is binding bloody rags with equally bloody hands, "Just keep going!"

Aiden is crying too.

Then Jesse saw Petra. Petra was emotionally broken barely able to perform CPR through her sobs. The old man snaps his fingers, and the image vanishes. "You are gone already to them. But should you go that way, they will help bring you back. But ultimately it is up to you in the long run."

"How am I not dead though, we've been talking forever."

"Time is different here Jesse. Forever here can be a second there."

Jesse leans back, shaking. He feels more tears threatening to come, "I-I don't know what to do."
"I want to help you Jesse, but I cannot interfere."

"W-who are you?" Jesse sniffs, "Really?"

The old man wave his hands and the cards vanish. He gets up and crosses the table, placing calloused hands on Jesse's shoulders. "Some part of you already knows the answer to that Jesse. Just like you now know who Steve and Alex truly are."

"I- I-" His last barrier gives away and Jesse breaks down. He leans forward, unable to keep himself up anymore. The elder holding him gently as he cries, he hums soothingly, singing a few words of a song.

"It will be okay Jesse..."

It wasn't fair! Why did it have to be this way? Why did it have to be so hard?! Die or keeping fighting the impossible fight? Who would want that choice?! He never asked for any of this! He just wanted to get home, to be with his friends again, not- not this! Why him?!

"Shhh, it will be alright," The other soothes as if he hears. "There is no wrong answer here. I need you to remember that."

Jesse chokes on his own sobs, unable to produce an answer.

"I have to leave you now."

"Just tell me what to do! Please?"

He kisses the top of Jesse's head, "It's not up to me. Whatever you choose, we will see each other soon."

"Wait-" Jesse opens his eyes and finds much to his dismay that the old man is gone. There is only a tune coming from beyond the window.

He scrambles to the opening, spotting the elder walking down the forest path. He looks back only once, smiles and waves. Then whistling a soothing tune, he vanishes, the song continuing long after he fades.

Reluctantly pulling himself away from the window, Jesse moves to the middle of the room. He stops right between the treehouse door and the black one.

Below its warm and soft, everything outside is soothing and peaceful. But the other door it how, and yet cold at the same time. It hurts to be simply near it. Jesse's bodily ache becomes more unbearable the closer he gets to it.

He collapses on the floor, between his two options.

He couldn't do this.

Reuben's oinks draw his attention and he leans over, looking below. The pig squeals up at him, thrilled to see him. Then he is momentarily distracted by a butterfly. Reuben gives chase, crashing into a stump. The pig bounces off like a ball and lands on his back.

Jesse lets out a choked laugh, "Hey buddy."

Reuben wiggles, scratching his back on the blissful grass.
"I miss you so much,"

There was an oink that returned the sentiments.

"Have you been having fun here?"

Happy squeals.

"Y-yeah it does look fun," Jesse let's out another emotion clogged laugh, tears running down his cheeks.

Reuben rights himself, looking up the ladder in concern.

He wants so badly to hold him, and he knows he can. Just climb down the ladder and-

Jesse looks at the other exit. The door is cracked open. It's dark on the other side. He can hear echoes of distant voices. They are desperate and broken, and screaming his name.

His friends are still trying to bring him back; they're still trying to hold on. They haven't given up on him yet.

Reuben squeaks below, a worried but loving sound. Jesse sighs heavily, not wanting to make the choice, but knowing full well he has to.

Jesse takes one last glance at the darkened exit, tears pouring down his cheeks.

"I'm sorry."
Fury of a Dark God

Reginald flinched as a creeper blew up within a very close distance to him. He turned his head away, dirt and gunpowder raining down upon him. He thought the battle at Ground Town had been madness.

This was hell.

The town was significantly more prepared in the terms of war then his own village had been. There were walls, archery towers and dozens of golems. But from what Reggie understood was that this time of year the spawns were usually in hibernation, the people gathered here to celebrate in peace. It was meant to be a happy time, they weren't expecting something such as this.

But now there were thousands crammed into a small village and in a confused panic.

"Behind you!" Bach barked.

Reggie rolled, dodging a cackling witch armed with vials of deadly substances. A golem got hold of her before the deranged female could attack again; sending her body crumpling to the ground with sickening crunch. Reggie almost vomited at the sight of bloody mess.

"Don't look at it," Bach said gruffly, "We are not always blessed with them vanishing."

Reggie looked around and saw this to be true. There were many, many loots piles, but there were quite a few remains as well. A woman nearby, Mia if he remembered correctly, stabbed her blade into the stomach of an enderman. The creature screeched and fell back, purple-black blood staining her dress.

"There are so many!" Reggie gasped, swinging his blade and stabbing it into the skull of a creeper that came up behind Bach.

The blacksmith brought his hammer down, smashing a spider, the venom splattering against his legs. "We keep fighting! We cannot stop! Until Steve and Alex return with your friends we keep fighting!" He looked desperately towards the direction of his home, "I have to keep fighting."

He paused, and asked softly, "How far along is she?"

"She is due next month."

Reggie planted himself next to the larger man, "I promise in the best of my power then to see you both to that day."

Bach nodded solemnly, grateful.

A sound tore through the panic of the town, almost like a bomb going off in the night. Reggie looked to the volcano as Incendia shook, smoke pouring so heavily from the mouth that it blocked out the moon.

"Notch's beard," Bach gasped.

Reggie's heart stopped, staring as the mountain shot sparks into the night and all along the black hills of the behemoth, hidden by the trees; spawns screamed and screeched in rage.
"Petra stop! He's breathing!"

The ginger immediately pulled away, looking at Jesse with wide tear stained eyes.

The male let out a shaky breath, "I'm sorry," he mumbled.

The emotional overload made Lukas cave in, he started crying again, "It's okay Jesse! We're here, you're gonna be okay," he soothingly repeated over and over. "You're going to be okay!"

"I'm...sorry."

"Don't be, just hang in there. Just keep breathing for us, you're gonna make it." Lukas brushed shaggy dirty hair out of Jesse's face, "We're gonna get you home."

The other male's skin was clammy and pale, and each breath he took was a rasping struggle that Lukas feared would be his last. Sweat ran down his face, and his lips mumbled incoherent words.

"Just hang in there Jesse, please."

Aiden pulled away, back from his patchwork, "I'm not an expert but this is going to hold until we get him somewhere safer." He wiped his forearm on his sweaty forehead, cringing has it smeared blood on the side of his face. He swapped to wiping it off on his already blood stained jeans, "It's not going to last though, we have to get him out of this hell hole and we have to hurry."

"Where are we going to go?" Lukas asked, "Even if the ladder was still here, we couldn't have gotten Jesse across the bridge."

Aiden put away Jesse's destroyed armor, looking around distressed, "I don't-"

Suddenly Petra was up on her feet, "Steve!"

A bloody hand appeared over the chasm ledge, shakily grabbing hold. Aiden left Lukas with Jesse and scrambled over to aid Petra in pulling the Immortal up.

Steve buckled onto the gravel, breathing hard and bleeding profusely from his wounds. His deity state was sputtering out, already his eyes were back to normal and his skin was revealing heavy damage to his physical form. The man heaved, blood oozing out of his mouth.

"Why aren't you healing," Petra asked distressed and she struggled to keep him upright.

"What do you mean healing?" Aiden asked.

"Alex and Steve can heal from their wounds, we've seen it before."

"And it isn't working?" Aiden asked.

"He should be, it should work," Lukas said worried.

Steve let out a weak cough, splatters of blood flying past his split lips. The motion almost sent him toppling forward onto his hands, Aiden and Petra his only upright support, "I- I won't heal."

"Why?!" Petra asked alarmed.
"I can't-hhhngh!" Steve rasped, "Long ago...I placed -" he hissed, "I placed enchantment runes here - erg - T-to kill Herobrine, to - to-"

"To kill an Immortal?"

The adult shakily nodded, "Yes."

"Tell us where the runes are, we'll get rid of them so you can heal-"

"They are d-deep in the mountain Petra, and- hhh- after all these- these ages, even I can't remember-" Steve moaned, "Herobrine is too strong now, even without the enchantments - Alex and I- we can't-" he couched up more blood, and tried to stop it with his hand.

"Steve!"

Steve looked around, then he pointed a wobbly and bloody finger towards a tunnel. It was still intact despite the colossal damage to the city, "If you - hnngh- follow that passage, it will t-take you to the base of the mountain. You - you can head straight for the village-

"We are not leaving you here!" Petra argued.

"Alex and I...can buy you time. T-take Jesse- take him and get as far as you can."

"Steve-"

Steve gently grabbed her shoulder, "Petra, I'm sorry. But there is no way, we're leaving this mountain alive. We have enough in - in us both to buy you time. Please..." He stood, wobbling slightly, "Go please."

"You can't do this!"

"I can't let him take...take him a second time..."Steve mumbled.

Before anyone could protest further, Steve was off, slipping back into his weakening deity state. He once more joined his wife in fighting off their greatest foe.

"We can't leave them!" Lukas demanded.

"We have no choice!" Aiden walked over and pulled Jesse carefully up, "He's running out of time. They're trying to protect us and give us a chance. We have to go or everything is going to be in vain."

"We can't let them die!" Petra argued.

"I don't want to be the bad guy here!" Aiden grunted as he and Lukas adjusted Jesse's weight between them. "But Steve asked, and I for one am not going to be the reason his son gets killed."

Son?!

Lukas was stunned, "What did you say?!"

"Alex and Steve are his parents. It's the only reason he was able to- Wait," Aiden's expression changed. "Did neither of you know?!"

"No! When would have known that!"
"When I got Herobrine monologueing he told me everything. I don't think he expected me to live. But he told me about Jesse and Alex and Steve. I assumed that is why he was after Jesse. Steve is his enemy and he's trying to hurt him through Jesse."

Lukas looked towards the struggling couple, letting out a frustrated hiss. This new development was a hard and heavy blow. He hated this, feeling useless, "We can't leave them regardless of who they are!"

"Are you kidding," Aiden snapped, "I don't want to leave them either but have you seen the battle going on! Herobrine will smash us like bugs. Now we have to-"

"C-can't..."

Jesse.

Petra leaned in, "Jesse? What did you just say?"

The brunet moaned slightly, "He...can't."

Lukas looked at him worried, "Who can't? Herobrine?"

"We...had...he can't."

Petra shook her head, "He's delirious. Let's go, it's getting worse! We have to get him out of here!"

"Wait! I know what he's talking about!" Aiden's eyes lit up, "Jesse made a deal with Herobrine!"

Her expression twisted into horror. "He did what?!" Petra asked, startled.

"Not in the way that you think. Herobrine wanted the Witherstorm power-"

"Wait what-"

"I really don't have time to explain that bit, but long story short it's the reason he's stronger." Then Aiden added quickly, "That's why Herobrine kidnapped me. He must not have been able to get to you two. He offered me for Jesse's power. Jesse agreed to it, but he only swore to do it as long as Herobrine wouldn't hurt any of us."

"Doesn't mean he won't." Petra countered, "What's going to stop him?"

"I honestly don't think he can. I think is has something to do with swearing on Notch. When he had me hostage he said he couldn't kill me till after midnight," Aiden cringed, "He dealt a lot of pain, but he didn't kill me."

Lukas shifted, his heart racing and his gears turning.

What if...

"In that case-"

There was a sickening crack, and the trio looked sharply just in time to see Herobrine break Alex's leg. She snapped out of her god mode in an instant. The Dark Immortal hurled her to the opposite side of the room, where the female collapsed to the ground with an anguished cry. Unable to get up she struggled in agony on the floor.

Steve cursed and lunged at his brother, but Herobrine stabbed his sword into the ground and grabbed
Steve by the throat and hurled him. "Game is over Steven!" he cackled.

"Steve!" Alex cried.

"No!" Petra cursed.

Steve landed not far away from the trio, his head cracking against the stone wall. The impact stunned him out of his deity state, and the First fell to the ground below, creating a tiny crater on impact. He crawled out just as Herobrine approached the edge of it. He casually kicked Steve in the jaw. The injured male's head snapped sideways and he slumped down with a groan.

"Now you know." Herobrine said as he kneeled down before him. He took hold of his brother's hair, wrenching his head up, "Now you know exactly what it was like all those ages ago. You chose everything, now you will lose everything! I have taken your son; I will take your wife! Herobrine snarled, "And when it is all said and done, I'm going to leave you here. I could care less what happens to you after this." He slammed Steve's head back into the ground.

Herobrine got up, and began walking away, drawing his sword up from the floor, "You've lost brother. You've lost everything. Now you know what that feels like," he said as he walked towards a struggling Alex.

Steve reached out with a weak and bloodied hand, but his strength soon gave way and it fell limply to the ground.

Lukas's blood boiled, and he frowned deeply, "Petra! Swap places with me!"

"What?!"

"Just do it!"

She joined Aiden in holding up Jesse as Lukas slipped out, "Wait! What are you doing?!"

He already had his bow out, drawing an arrow from the quiver. He checked the case, he still had a few arrows left, he hadn't lost too many when the bridge collapse. "I have a plan. We can help Steve and Alex, and get Jesse out of here."

"Lukas wait-" Aiden started.

"We can save all three of them!"

"Lukas! You can't!"

"Steve and Alex have deity modes, I bet Herobrine does too. I can probably get it out of him if I get him mad enough, especially if he can't hurt any of us. I'll attack that ego of his."

"Are you crazy?"

"We are getting this group out alive. Now get Jesse out of here!"

He didn't wait for a reply as he turned away from his friends and advanced on Herobrine. He pulled the drawstring back. In the smoggy volcanic air, the diamond arrowhead glinted brightly. Its enchantments made magical swirls along the sharp and valuable stone.

"What enchantment did you put on them?"

"Oh...They hurt evil things..."
Herobrine.

Herobrine was an evil thing. He thought about back at the Gate, how his skin bubbled when hit with Alex's arrows. He thought about the enderman, how it too reacted the same way during its attack on Jesse.

**Herobrine!**

These would hurt him.

He looked at Steve, the Immortal laying weakly on the floor. He was unable to get up, hardly able to move, but he was trying. He tried to get to his wife who was quickly coming to face death. Herobrine moving in to make the final blow.

Lukas gritted his teeth.

"Someone once taught me the best way to relax is to think about good and pleasant things, things that soothe you. Always think positive, even in battle or hard times."

Focus on what makes you happy, he reminds himself.

Think about your friends, Axel and Olivia, Maya, Gill, Aiden, Petra, Ivor, Jesse. Think about them Steve and Alex, how much they helped you, the gifts and time that were given.

Dancing at the festival, think of how much fun it was.

Lukas adjusted the arrow.

Think about the food fight you had in the kitchen with Jesse and Alex. Think about how long it took Alex to get the cookie dough out of her hair, and yours...

Remember that time Aiden made you soup?

How everyone laughed at your 'elopement'? Think about...

Lukas swallowed.

Think about... Think about **home** Lukas.

Everyone is going to go home!

"This is for Steve." he growled.

The arrow flew, hitting the walking Herobrine in the shoulder blade. Immediately the skin began to bubble. He snarled more out of surprise than pain, the demigod wasn't expecting any more attacks. He turned around; looking at Lukas, "Are you serious?" he almost seemed surprised.

"You aren't going to win this Herobrine."

"And you'd be the one to stop me?"

"I will if I have to!" Lukas said angrily. "You've hurt my friends! You've hurt Jesse And- and his family! You've tricked Petra, and you've threatened me! I'm not going to stand here and let you get away with this!"
The man scoffed, "Sure," and he turned away, yanking the arrow out. He kneeled down in front of the wounded woman, lifting his sword up.

"This one is for Alex,"

This arrow hit its mark before Herobrine could stab down to finish Alex. The weapon embedded itself into his ribs.

Herobrine snarled, and the entire mountain shook.

"L-Lukas! What are you doing?!" Alex cried.

The skin bubbled and sizzled on impact once more. He glanced over his shoulder, "You're cute kid," he scoffed before turning his head back. He played indifference, but Lukas saw the skin of Herobrine's arms crack slightly.

It was working.

Lukas was closer now, "This is from Petra, and Aiden!" he snapped.

Herobrine caught the arrow before it could make its mark on him. He snapped the arrow shaft in his hands, but he didn't turn around, "You dare?"

"I don't have a reason to be afraid of you!" Lukas snapped, he needed to push harder, "You're pathetic!"

Incendia rumbled.

He kept walking closer to the Lost One, "You couldn't beat Steve an eon ago, and after years and years of time that you could have used to become stronger, you still can't beat him! You can't even beat Alex! You strike fear into the hearts of men! Hah! You had to take power from one, from a mere mortal! You had to take a power from Jesse, that came from a monster you probably couldn't even defeat! You had to take it from Jesse who beat it for you! You couldn't even face him off in combat directly! You had to make a deal! You the mighty Herobrine, needed a boost- an edge -to take out your own brother, who hasn't even been out fighting something worthy of his skills in Notch knows how long! He's rusty and you still needed help?"

More cracks appeared.

"What kind of plague against humanity does that?! You are nothing Herobrine, your name doesn't even hold an frightening appeal to me. You are pathetic excuse for a creation of Notch. You had to take power from a mortal, and even now you have to use an safety measure to make sure Steve and Alex lose! How lame is that!" Lukas mocked. "You're talking me down, because I think you're afraid of me! You can't even take me on I bet!"

Those white soulless eyes flared in fury, and he looked away. " Last...chance." he warned his voice slow and snarly.

"Good! I'd hate to repeat myself more than once." Lukas spat back. He stopped walking, merely three feet away from the insane maniac. He pulled the string of his bow back, "This one is for Jesse! You disgusting excuse for a God! "

His plan worked.

Herobrine's temper flew just as the arrow released. With a roar of rage, the man didn't even look
back behind him as he swung his sword out. The arrow was cut in half, but part of it still embedded itself into his armpit, damaging the skin there as well.

Lukas saw it coming, he saw the blade move and was only able to take a step back before it reached him.

Herobrine's blade grazed along Lukas's throat, curving up and ending off on his right cheekbone. The step back had saved his life, any closer and he would have been dead on the floor. The wound wasn't deep enough to be lethal, but Lukas stumbled back in pain, struggling not to scream. He gripped his throat as blood welled through the narrow cut, fire coursing through his body. All of Herobrine's rage was reflected into the attack and Lukas could feel the poison of it.

There was a loud boom, almost like the sound of a distant bomb exploding and it sent Lukas's ear ringing. Everyone in the room froze; even the mountain went briefly silent.

Herobrine's eyes went wide, and he slowly turned his head, shifting his gaze towards Lukas.

"Look what you did-"

Lukas took a step back, still clutching his wound.

Herobrine's skin rapidly cracked, revealing a black void with nothing beyond, it didn't deteriorate completely, but the effect was still terrifying. There was nothing but darkness, no starlight, save for a deep red glow that escaped on occasion.

The plan had worked; Lukas had found and unleashed the fury of the dark god.

"Hxd'en adrwnm nenahcqrwp."

"Oh Notch!" Alex was struggling to get up, panic in her eyes, "Lukas!"

Herobrine turned fully, fists balled in fury, "Hxd'en cjtnw rc jfjh."

"Lukas!"

Lukas looked at Alex, alarmed by her expression. She was terrified. "LUKAS RUN!" she screamed.

Lukas turned and bolted as Herobrine roared in rage. The entire volcano shaking to match his fury

"YOU WILL SUFFER!"
The Night's Cry

Petra and Aiden moved down the slope, the unconscious Jesse balanced between them. The mountain shook violently behind the pair, fire spewed and ash poured down from the sky.

Petra hissed in frustration, looking desperately back.

Aiden did too, growling a little, then, "Go back,"

She looked at him, "What?"

"You have to go back for that frickin idiot!" the brunet grunted under Jesse's weight, "Assuming Lukas isn't a smear on the floor," Aiden mumbled. The statement was harsh, but Aiden's voice was saturated with fear and worry. "I'm sure he's not-"

Petra and Aiden both stumbled as the ground shook. But between the two of the them, they managed to keep themselves and Jesse upright.

Petra looked back towards the volcano, "But what about you? What about Jesse?"

Aiden scooped an arm under Jesse's legs, taking the youth's full weight bridal style. "Go get Lukas, I'll take care of Jesse. We'll be fine."

Petra hesitated, the dilemma of saving Jesse or helping Lukas tearing her apart.

"Petra. Go."

"O-okay," She pointed, "Stay on this trail. Do you see those lights in the distance? That's the village. They can help you with Jesse."

"He'll make it," Aiden assured, "Now help the idiot!"

Petra took a longing look at Jesse, and nodded, taking off as Aiden finished the sentence. "Be safe Aiden!"

She was exhausted, emotional strain having drained her of almost everything she had. Save for one crucial adrenaline.

Nobody - nobody- hurts her friends.

That alone, kept Petra running.

An enderman appeared from the shadows of the tree line, enraged and corrupted by Herobrine's sickness. Petra drew her sword but did not stop running, "Get out of my way!" she roared.

The enderman advanced, screeching as it took on this game of chicken.

Petra growled, and as the spawn lunged she swung.

---

A loud noise went off like a bomb, and Aiden nearly stumbled. In his arms Jesse let out a gasp, and his eyes peeked open for just a second, flashing with a bright light. Then he was limp once more in Aiden's arms.
Confused, Aiden looked back, *Lukas*...

A spider screeched in front of him, and Aiden looked forward, to see a group of spawns advancing on him.

Aiden took a step back, he wasn't armed, and he wouldn't be able to get Jesse's sword in time without getting attacked. His heart was pounding hard.

Head against Aiden's neck, Jesse let out a weak moan. Whatever had happened in the mountain just then made Jesse stronger. But he was still slipping away.

He needed to get help, Aiden *had* to make it, and he was running out of time.

Steeling his nerves, Aiden pulled Jesse closer, ducked the swinging arms of a zombie and started running.

There had been a story teller in the village the first night of the festival. Lukas didn't think much on the story till now. But the memory now came in with such perfect clarity.

"The Immortals have always been powerful children. But when they are in their godly forms is when they are the most dangerous."

"Can they control it?" a child asked.

The story teller smiled, "When they choose this state they are in control."

"Choose?"

"Sometimes, fear, anger, sorrow, it brings out a side of us that we never knew we had. This applies to the Immortals as well."

"So what if they're angry?"

"A Deity State induced by rage is the worst there is. Notch help the soul that is the target of that rage."

Well...Lukas found out very quickly how dangerous that 'rage' truly was. Lukas thought that if he lived to tell his own tale of these events. He would have liked to say that he fought Herobrine bravely, and with dignity. Enraged demigod vs. under equipped mortal? Sounds epic.

But that really wasn't how it was happening.

Lukas cried out in a mix of fear and pain as the wall exploded behind him. This was not fighting. This was just survival instincts. The only fight was the fight to stay alive.

Which Lukas figured there was dignity in that...right?

Herobrine was in a blind rage, the dark God mode was in full swing. Losing whatever power he had stolen from Jesse, added on with Lukas's insult had actually made the man snap. So great was his wraith and so focused he was on the target of his rage, he had completely forgotten about a weakened Steve and Alex. Instead he passed over the opportunity of an easy kill and focused solely on Lukas. This was a good thing, for Steve and Alex anyway.

Herobrine's body stayed mostly together in his new state, unlike the other two. But the patches of black across his skin, mixed with the void of nothing that was his eyes, still made him terrifying,
Lukas had fled the moment Alex had screamed for him to. He spotted the tunnel Steve had pointed our earlier and carefully avoided it, opting to take another random door. He didn't need to go down the tunnel and risk his friend's safety as well. Petra and Aiden were nowhere in sight, so he assumed they listened to him and took Jesse to safety.

At least he hoped.

The tunnel he found himself in now was dark of foreboding, and Lukas forced himself to stay focused on the literal light at the other end. Herobrine's uncontrolled fury and lack of coordination was the only thing keeping him alive right now. But everytime he stumbled over some unknown object, his heart raced at the thought of that killer getting closer.

"I will catch you!" Herobrine's voice hissed, echoing through the dark tunnel, "I will make you welcome death!"

Lukas burst out of the tunnel, temporarily blinded by the lava light. He was in a circular room, with only one bridge cutting through the middle. All around him lavafalls dropped down and out of sight. The only other way out was at the far end of the bridge, splitting into three black tunnels.

Three options, three chances it might be a dead end. If so the chase would be over.

There was the option of going back, and risking facing Herobrine face on. That, or even jumping into the lava, and just ending it-

No.

Lukas dashed to the tunnel on the right. He was not going to kill himself, not while he had a chance. He intended to survive this.

Twenty feet in revealed a cave in, and Lukas skidded to a stop. "Damn!" he raced back. He still had time; Herobrine had been pretty far behind him. Lukas could pick another tunnel and still hope-

Herobrine stepped in front of the entrance, his blade already swinging.

Lukas screamed.

"I found you."

Aiden screamed and duck a leaping spider, the creature slamming into a nearby boulder. It broke one of its legs on impact, but it seemed unaffected by the injury. The spawn turned, screeching at Aiden. Herobrine's aura had poisoned the very heart of this world. Everything was spiraling into insanity.

Aiden just kept running, hearing the wounded creature drag itself after. The forest was a living nightmare, the farther he went down, the more spawns there seemed to be. More than once he got turned around in the dark maze of wood and rock, but then he'd manage to find the lights of the village, slowly getting closer each time.

Aiden tripped on uneven ground and one knee went down, Jesse moaning weakly as his head rolled against Aiden's shoulder. No, no, no, no! Aiden struggled to get up, knowing if he went completely down, he wouldn't be able to get up and it would be over for Jesse. His arms ached and his strained lungs screamed for air. His strength was failing him, but he had to keep going. He had to!

He staggered up, hearing a zombie moan somewhere on his left. It could smell blood, it could smell Jesse. Aiden hurried down the slope, sliding, skidding, he could see houses peeking through the tree
He was almost-

The village was on fire, the outskirts a warzone. Spawns were everywhere and locals were in the fight of their lives.

And enderman slammed into Aiden's back and he went down, crashing hard on to his knees just beyond the wall of the town. Jesse jerked in his arms and his head thumped against him. The teen whimpered in a mixture of delirium and pain.

The enderman screamed in fury. Foam and saliva pouring forth from its mouth. It lunged at the pair. Aiden tucked over Jesse, prepping himself for the inevitable hit. "No!"

A golem roared and Aiden flinched as the stone beast came from nowhere. The fists of the manmade creation slammed into the skull of the leaping enderman. The spawn crumbled to the ground, purple black blood splattering everywhere.

Aiden smeared the sticky substances out of his face just as the golem turned, arms raising to attack him. "No wait! Don't!" Aiden cried. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to protect Jesse.

"HOLD!"

The golem froze and Aiden opened his eyes again. He looked up fearfully at the large burly man before him, holding a massive bloodstained battle hammer.

He kneeled down snarling, "What have you done to Jesse?"

"I-"

"Wait!" a familiar voice cut through the screams and the din of the chaotic town, "Aiden? Aiden! Bach hold up he is a friend!"

"Reggie?!"

The guard captain came into view, dropping to his knees and pulling both Aiden and Jesse in, "Thank Notch you're alive!" He cried.

"How did you get here?!"

"Isa- after we got her to safety- said someone had taken you. Ivor and I came here for help. But as you can see-"

"Reg we don't have time, Jesse is hurt bad! Herobrine he-"

"Give him here," The big hulking man, now known as Bach said. He put his hammer away, lifting Jesse. "Anyone here a physician?!"

Someone from the gathering crowd raised their hand. A young meek man stepped into view, "I'm- I'm a apprentice?"

"That will do! Follow me-Name?"

"M-Matthew,"

"Come on! The rest of you hold the gate!" Bach ordered before hurrying off with Jesse.
Reggie pulled Aiden up, "Are you alright?"

"No," Aiden said hoarsely, "I hope I was fast enough, I-" He started to move. "Lukas and Petra are still back there I have-"

"We treat you first," the older male said firmly stopping him, "And then we go get them."

"We don't have time!"

"You're no good to them dead Aiden!"

The boy stiffened, taking one look at the smoldering mountain, "You're ... right," he said, and reluctantly followed Reggie into the village.

*Hang in there guys. I'm coming back.*

"I found you."

Screaming, Lukas slid to his knees, and by some Notch given grace, managed to slide under the oncoming weapon.

He was through and then onto his feet in an instant. No time to decided his next tunnel, Lukas just ran for the closest, the middle one. Lukas leapt over the space between the gaps of the two paths, the lava boiling and spewing below. Behind him, Herobrine roared and threw a chunk of wall.

Lukas stumbled in the raining debris, his hand slapping against the wall as he almost went down. But he managed to keep running. He prayed. Prayed hard to Notch- as he ran into the middle tunnel - that this passage kept going.

He was answered with a set of stairs.

The first step nearly broke his ankle and he cried out as he went down. Lukas rolled and tumbled, trying desperately to right himself. But he was only able to do so when he hit the wall- a corner in the staircase. Dazed and hurting he shakily stood, taking in his surroundings. Around the corner were more stairs, swallowed by the infinite blackness that ruled this fortress.

Roughly fifty steps above the little lighting left was blocked by Herobrine's form. The maniac laughing into the hallowed halls.

"How long do you intend to keep running boy? I *will* catch you."

Lukas took a shaky breath and hurried down the stairs. The feat was difficult in the dark. Some of the steps were chipped or broken, threatening to trip him and send him crashing down again. Every few hundred feet or so, he would slam into a wall, another corner, turn and keep going. He wasn't sure how far down he had gone but he was now roughly estimating forty to fifty steps per turn.

More than once did he catch a glimpse of a door, the hallways holding a secret in the inky blackness. Lukas may not be able to see his own hand, but he could see the eyes of the monsters in the dark. He didn't dare take a door, and just kept going down the stairs.

He was soaked in sweat, his shirt wetly sticking to his skin. Judging by the thick coppery smell, Lukas was sure the front part of his top was soaked in his own blood.

His throat throbbed, and so did his jaw. But he didn't have time or the means to treat them. Herobrine was still behind him somewhere, he spit out a creepy phrase every few seconds or so, just to unnerve
him. His voice made Lukas's heart race.

"Don't you ever laugh as the hearse goes by... For you may be the next one to die..."

Lukas finally staggered into flat ground and he paused. It was dark still, but not as dark as the stairs. There was the occasional still working glowstone, and even a few luminescent mushrooms scattered around. Tunnels spanned out in every direction, rails and rails cars filled them as far as they eye can see.

He was in the diamond mines.

Lukas stiffened, knowing full well spawns made their homes in mines such as these. But then again there was a bigger issue coming down the stairs.

"Ready or not..."

Lukas's breath hitched, and he didn't even take the time to analyze a good route. He picked the nearest tunnel and fled into the dark.

"Here... I... Come!"

Petra's iron sword shattered after the zombie went down. She cursed and continued her running. She still had her knife, she'd use that if she had too.

The ginger burst back into the destroyed and ancient market square, the air hot and nearly intolerable in the fury of the volcano. Steve and Alex were nowhere to be seen. There were only pools of blood where Steve used to be.

Did... Did they die?

No!

She saw Steve picking a limp Alex up, face contorting in pain. He still was coughing up blood.

"Steve! Petra called.

Steve looked sharply over. "Petra what are you doing here?!"

She ran over, "I came back for Lukas!"

"It's not safe here-"

A scream tore from one of the tunnels and Petra snapped her head in that direction. "Lukas!" she looked desperately back at Steve, "I have to help him!"

Steve pointed at one of the paths, "Herobrine followed him down that tunnel. Just left of the one you came through. But Petra-"

"I'm going after! Can you get out of here? Will you be alright?"

Steve grimly nodded, "As soon as we're clear of the enchantments, we'll heal."

"Good!" Petra was running again.

"I'll find you as soon as I get Alex out!" Steve called after.
Petra was already down the tunnel, she had no time to acknowledge so she waved an arm. She leapt over boulders and debris. Only her breathing and the lava's roar was her source of sound. At one point she grabbed an old torch from the wall, scraping it against the stone wall as she ran. It sparked, and sizzled, finally coming to life and lighting her way. But the torch did little to guide her along. The darkness in the tunnels was almost stifling, as if any light was something to be snuffed out.

How would Steve find her here in this black nightmare? She figured she had his ways.

Could she hold off Herobrine till he arrived though?

_As long as I can_, she decided.

The tunnel ended over a bridge, three separate paths branching out before her.

No!

Panic and despair cut through her adrenaline. This was it, she'd never find Lukas! Aiden wouldn't be able to save Jesse, she'd lose everyone and-

Blood!

Sticky, dark, blood.

It was a handprint, smeared on the wall of the central path. Petra felt her heart skip a beat at the sight of it. *Lukas!*

She ran, following the trail of blood droplets along the ground. It led her down the hall, to a set of stairs. Diamond arrows were scattered along the stone steps, the valuable ore glinting brightly in the torchlight.

Lukas had gone this way...

Petra took a deep breath and hurried into the consuming void, "Hang on Lukas I'm coming!"

"And Lukas and Petra are still up there?" Reggie asked, swiftly wrapping bandages around Aiden's abused hands.

"I think Lukas did something to Herobrine, I think Jesse got the power he took from him back,"

Aiden flinched, "Which means he can hurt them- Reggie this is enough I have to go!"

"You're still hurt, what about your leg?!"

"I'll be fine Reg, I have to-"

"I need more drugs in here!" Matthew cried from where he treated Jesse. He was in one of the side rooms of the blacksmith shop.

Ivor hurried by, pale and arms full of bandages, "We don't have much left!"

"We have to get him something! I'm losing him!"

Bach's wife, Mariah, was sweaty and shaking in the corner, "Oh Notch, please bring the Healer back to us." She begged of her God.
Aiden's breath hitched and he quickly pulled his hands free of Reginald, "Alex, we have to get Alex!"

"Who?!"

"She's the second Immortal Reg, she can help Jesse! I have to-"

Suddenly Bach was back in the shop, almost white, "We've lost the wall!"

Mariah covered her mouth, a sharp pained gasp escaping her lips.

"What do you mean?!" Reggie gasped.

"A charged creeper brought part of our defenses down. There are hundreds of spawns coming towards us. We are moving everyone to the town hall, amphitheater, and library. They're the only buildings that might hold out till sunrise. Everyone has to fall back now!"

"We move him anymore and we are going to lose this boy!" Matthew yelled from the next room.

"We can't leave him here!" Bach argued.

"He's lost too much blood, he moves anymore he's gone!"

"Then we hold the house," Reggie said, "We move everyone else back."

"That's suicide," Bach started to say.

"B-Bach, we are not leaving this house," Mariah said shakily.

The blacksmith sighed, "Mariah luv, we can't afford to be sentimental about this house. We'll find a way to get Jesse to safety and-"

"N-no Bach," the female was on a slow collapse to the floor, "'I- I can't."

Bach gasped and caught his wife in his arms, "Mariah!"

Aiden looked down, spotting the puddle on the floor, his face twisting in horror, "Oh Notch! She's gone into labor!"

"She can't now she's not due! We need Alex! It's too high a -"

"Bach, the baby is coming whether you want him or not!" Mariah gasped.

Matthew cursed, running bloody fingers through matching bloody red hair."I can't take care of them both!"

Ivor got up, "Then I'll take care of her! You keep treating Jesse!"

Bach looked sick, "Can you deliver a baby?"

Ivor helped him carry her into the next guest bedroom, "I have more experience then not doing anything at all."

Reggie got up, "Looks like we're holding the house."

Aiden nodded, "Looks like it,"
"Bach! You stay inside; make sure no monsters get in here." Reg headed for the door, "Aiden and I will hold the front."

Bach nodded as he closed Mariah's door, he looked at Aiden, who was scoping the room for weapons, "Are you well enough to fight?"

"The spawns don't care if I am or not, so I'm just gonna have to be." Aiden said, he pointed at two diamond swords on display on the wall, "Are those for show?"

"Who puts a weapon up simply for show?" the man answered gruffly.

"Good," He yanked them off the wall.

"Can you fight with two weapons boy?"

*Isa taught me*... Aiden thinks, but he nods.

"This was not how I wanted my child to come into the world... "The large man sighed.

"I promise I will do my best to keep every spawn I can away from this house."

"And I'll do all I can for Jesse."

Aiden nodded, and stepped out of the shop closing the door behind him. Outside everywhere people were running, fleeing in panic. They retreated deeper into the heart of the town, crying out for their deity and their *Immortals* to save them. He turned his head to the mountain, torn that he couldn't help Lukas and Petra, but knowing full well that Jesse and now Mariah needed him here.

The mountain roared, and the night answered with the cry of hundreds- perhaps thousands of spawns as they marched on the failing village.
Lukas collapsed against the wall, his lungs heaving, ears ringing. He struggled not to gasp, each sound he made would echo painfully loud in the abandoned mines. It vibrated down the hallowed halls, leaving little bread crumbs for the killer in the dark.

"M~arco…..

Lukas's breath hitched and he got off the wall, looking uneasily around the corner.

"Have you never played Marco Polo Lukas?"

There was a faint screech as Herobrine's sword dragged against the stone in some unknown hallway.

Lukas backed away from where he guessed the source was. It was nearly impossible to tell in the disorienting dark. Herobrine could be anywhere, and Lukas was sure the demigod had a better fix on Lukas's location that he had on Herobrine's.

An enderman shot out of the dark, and Lukas's strained nerves got the better of him. He cried out in a mixture of surprise, pain and fear as the creature slammed him into the wall. The black skinned monster screeched at him, foam and salvia dripping from sharp and glinting teeth.

But just as suddenly as it appeared, the enderman backed a step away. It whimpered, before vanishing off in a wisp of smoke. It left an endermite behind, that spawn too quickly vanished into a nearby stone.

They could sense him.

From somewhere around the bend his voice came again, teasing, almost singing,

"Marco~"

Mariah let out a scream and Ivor tried not to flinch as she gripped his hand tighter. "Ooooh Notch preserve me!"

"Just breath Mariah," Ivor soothed, even though inside he was very worried.

This pregnancy is going too fast.

"They're- they're getting more constant." The dark-haired female panted out, "Oh, it feels like my hips are going to snap!"

"That's normal, remember deep breaths, you need to keep- "

Mariah screamed in pain again, and Ivor felt the bones in his hand creak in protest.

From the other room, Matthew called out, "Ivor-"

"Stay with Jesse! I have this!"
"Where is Bach?" the woman asked.

Bach had gone outside a few moments ago, Aiden and Reggie were both struggling to keep the house safe. The spawns could hear the screaming and they could smell the blood. They wanted in, they wanted an easy kill.

"He's making sure you and your child are safe, now just keep breathing you're almost dilated enough."

"Reg look out!"

The guard captain yelped as a charged creeper lunged at him, he scrambled back, nearly falling onto his bum.

"Duck!" Aiden yelled.

Reginald ducked just as Aiden jumped over him and spun, slashing the throat of the creature. The blood splattered everywhere as the monster went down. Droplets of it hit Aiden's skin, sending little shock waves across his already damaged body. He landed on the other side of his partner, boots squishing in the mud, soaked in spawn blood.

"Are you alright?" he asked, pulling Reg up.

Reggie straightened, "Yes, thanks." He let out a huff, "No time for victory though," he pointed grimly.

Aiden looked past the streets, towards the break in the far wall. Spawns were pouring over the cave in, eager to slay. "Look at it this way Reggie," he stated grimly, "It could be worse."

"How so?!

Aiden adjusted his stance and raised his swords, difficult as it was with the growing fatigue. We could be Lukas and Petra right now, he thought grimly, Or Jesse....

The first spawn got within arms reach, an armored zombie. It reached out with cracked and broken fingers, moaning for flesh. Aiden tightened his grip and went to stab.

Petra yelped, ducking as a spider lunged out from one of the side halls. She only kept her torch there long enough to look for any signs of blood before she continued her run.

Where was Lukas?!

Petra's fear levels were rising. There were so many doors, so many passages down these flight of stairs and Lukas could be down any one of them

What if she went the wrong way?

What if it was already too late?

Her heart pounded, she was terrified.

"Lukas where are you?!" She cried.

She stopped on a corner, one way was a door, one way was the stairs. A blood splatter stained the
grey stone at her feet. She looked down the pitch-black stairs, then towards the halls.

Which way?

"LUKAS!"

She took a step towards the dark hallway.

"No."

Petra froze. That just then…..was that-

"No," the strange voice came again.

She stepped away from the door closer to the stairs. She recognized the voice, it felt so long ago now but she remembered it. She first heard it inside the Hallway…She moved closer to the stairs.

"Yes, this way, go this way!"

Petra ran down the stairs, her torch guiding over broken steps and cracked stone. She paused often, usually at every door, but the voice kept urging her.

"Keep going, keep going!"

So, Petra just started to run, no longer pausing at every break away passage. She put all her faith and trust in this voice, it was the only hope she had anymore. Petra ran deeper and deeper down, step after step, following the mysterious guide in the dark.

"Go down! This way!"

Lukas ran down yet another poorly lit tunnel. All around him diamonds embedded in stone glinted in the mushroom light. Some of them were even as big as his head. This mine was rich and plentiful. If it hadn't been for the disaster all those ages ago, Lukas partially wondered what this city would have been like.

Lukas rounded a corner and collapsed against a support beam, struggling hard to control his breathing.

"I know you're here," Herobrine hissed. There was the sound of a sword scrapping once again against the ground. The noise echoes through the abandoned mines, it was still impossible to discern the origin point.

Lukas held his breath and looked slowly around the corner. At the juncture about thirty feet away, Lukas could make out Herobrine's back. There was a faint glow of white near his head, it was his eyes glowing in the gloom.

Could he see in the dark? Lukas wondered. If he could-

Herobrine turned.

Breath hitching, Lukas quickly pulled himself back around his corner, plastering himself against the beam. He was pretty sure Herobrine hadn't seen him. But then again……

"I'll find you."
Lukas stifled his breathing with his hands. Herobrine's psychological attacks not helping ease his panic.

Somewhere in the dark -farther away this time- there was an agonized scream of a spider. It was followed by the crunched of bones and liquids hitting the floor and Lukas struggled not to whimper in fear. The screams cut off suddenly and the mines once more went silent as stone.

Lukas loosened up slightly, sliding weakly down the board a bit. He was shaking as he let out the breath he didn't know he had been holding. It seemed he had finally lost Herobrine.

The swish of a sword dashed his hopes.

Lukas ducked just as the sword came from around the corner. He rolled as sparks flew from where the blade met the wall.

"Found you!" Herobrine snarled, he reached out, a hand grabbing hold of Lukas's collar. But his tunic was in poor enough condition from previous tearing; so with a loud scream and a hard yank, Lukas tore away. The fabric ripped loudly as he broke free from the other's grip.

Herobrine cursed and swung his blade. It was a slower swing this time because Herobrine had to yank it free out of the wall. But even so Lukas barely got away.

The sword lightly sliced his back, right across the shoulder blades. It hardly cut his clothes much less his skin. Like his first injury from earlier it was a non-lethal cut. But like before it sent a wave of agony sweeping through his body. Almost as if he had been burned by fire. "AUGH!"

Herobrine's magic. All his hate went into his power, all of it was poison.

Lukas staggered slightly, crashing into a wall. He rolled along it as Herobrine swung once more. Then as the deity was pulling the blade free from the rock, Lukas launched off the stone. He had dropped his bow at the beginning of this cat and mouse chase. Then when he fell down the stairs he had lost most of his arrows.

But he still had one arrow left.

Lukas- gripping the shaft tight- stabbed low, and felt it make its mark somewhere along Herobrine's leg. He could hear the hiss of skin, and the burning smell that followed invaded his nostrils.

Herobrine roared in fury.

Lukas raced down the tunnel, no time to see if he had successfully slowed Herobrine down.

A large rock flew past him, smashing into the wall. Rock and diamond spewed everywhere. Lukas snatched up a diamond and hurled it back at his opponent. Herobrine caught it, snarling. His eyes flared, and with one firm squeeze the diamond shattered in his hand. He hurled the shards back at Lukas.

Some of them made their marks and Lukas stumbled down with a cry, tears of pain escaping the corner of his eyes. He looked back as Herobrine advanced, the arrow still bubbling in his leg.

"What good will this do you?" the other demanded. "What good will this be for Jesse?"

Lukas cringed and struggled up, once more fleeing into the dark.

"You can't escape!"
Lukas just ran. He was on a strange sort of adrenaline high. The sweet lie that if he just kept moving, he'd live. He wouldn't die here if he just kept moving. *Just keep running, just keep running.*

Slimes were rather solid when they slammed into you. Aiden shouted in pain as the large gelatin creature smashed into him, crashing him into the building behind him.

"Aiden!"

"I'm fine!," Aiden struggled to shove the giant creature off and get his weapons at a good angle, "Reggie the house!"

Reggie turned around just as a creeper shambled up the blacksmith steps.

"Reg don't let it get in!"

The older male yanked it off the steps, both of them crashing to the ground. He rolled away as the creeper hissed, but it was still too close.

"REG!"

Suddenly the slime shoving against Aiden backed away, and he took the moment to stab the creature. He whipped around, racing for the creeper-

An arrow head stabbed down on the creeper, and it disappeared in a poof of smoke. The wielder of the weapon was Alex. The woman straightened, chest heaving with each gasping breath.

Reggie got up, "Oh Gods, are you alright?!"

Across the clearing Bach gasped, "Alex!" he ran over as the ginger staggered slightly. He grabbed her arm, "Alex your leg- what-"

"W-where-"

"What?"

Alex mumbled something, she spat up blood, "Where is-"

Aiden grabbed her hand, "In Bach's house! Reg, Bach! Have you got the clearing?"

The two men nodded, Alex's arrival having temporarily scared off the spawns.

Aiden turned only to find Alex already entering Bach's house.

"Oh my God's Mariah!" the woman immediately spotted Ivor and Bach's wife through the open bedroom door.

"Alex! Oh thank Notch you're alright! But you need-"

"When did this start?" Alex asked Ivor.

"About an hour ago."

"How dilated-"

"Alex!" Mariah snapped.
The Immortal stiffened.

Mariah reached up, gently cupping Alex's chin, "I knew the risks when Bach and I decided to do this. But right now, you, can't be helping me."

"But-"

"Alex, stopped being the Healer, I know that's your role in the universe, but- I know where your heart needs to be." the woman gasped out, "Go be there for your baby."

Tears pooled in Alex's and she weakly nodded. She kissed Mariah on the forehead, "You're going to be okay."

"We have her," Ivor assured.

Alex quickly departed to the other room the door closing behind her with a soft click.

"Damn woman, still putting others before herself," Mariah cringed.

"It's a trait I've noticed in most woman," Ivor said. He glanced at Aiden, "Are you alright?"

Aiden nodded, "Jesse has a chance now." He headed for the door, "Now there is just Lukas and Petra to bring home. I only hope Steve is handling that." He tightened his grip on his weapons, "But we'll keep fighting till then."

Lukas fell down to shaky knees, choking on fear and desperation.

"There is nothing you can do to stop this Lukas!" Herobrine called from the dark.

_Just keep running… Get up Luka! Get up!_

"They're failing Lukas."

Lukas got up, but the statement made him pause.

"I know you can hear me. Let me inform you that your friends are failing."

He shook his head, _don't listen!_ He raced forward, ducking behind a minecart.

"I can see through the eyes of the spawns. Do you know what I see? They're all dying Lukas. Aiden, Bach, Reginald, they all fight for their lives, trying to defend a quaint little house."

_Aiden? Bach?! Reg-_

"Their strength is depleting Lukas. Aiden will die too."

_No!_

"Inside that little house, Mariah is in labor…"

Lukas covered his ears, _no, no, no, nonono!_

"You know what I see Lukas?" Herobrine hissed, "I see a body with no soul. You were too late."

_NO!_
"Maybe I should let you live." The demigod taunted, "Imagine finally getting home Lukas, imagine finally being safe. Except now you have to explain to Axel and Olivia why Jesse isn't there. You are going to have to explain to them what happened to him. What will you tell them Lukas? Would you tell them how you let him go... alone?"

Lukas pressed tighter against his ears, he wasn't hearing this, he couldn't hear this.

"Will you tell them how he died, in pain and alone as you stayed behind?"

Lukas's heart froze as hand pulled his own free of his ear.

"Will you tell them how you weren't strong enough?"

He screamed, wrenching away as Herobrine's glowing orbs glared him down. He hurled a rock from the minecart at the man, not looking back as he other tilted his head to dodge the projectile.

"You're lying!"

Herobrine followed after, "Jesse's gone Lukas. And no amount of praying to my Father will bring him back."

"LIAR!"

He burst out onto a old wooden bridge, temporarily blinded by the glow of lava all around. His boots slapped against the metal rails. Lava flowed in a boiling river below. There was another tunnel on the other end of the bridge, and farther still beyond that was moonlight.

Outside!

He could make it to the woods, he-

With a roar a boulder flew over his head, smashing against the tunnel opening. Lukas skidded to a stop as the rocks crumbled down over the opening. Then much to his despair the bridge collapsed as well.

Lukas screamed as he plummeted, the drop was not long thankfully. He crashed onto another bridge below. Rock, wood, metal, everything showered down, shaking the second structure, but it held.

Lukas shakily stood, body wracked in pain. The new tunnel before him was blocked, but there was still one behind him that led back to the mines. Lukas started running.

"Play time is over."

Herobrine landed right next to him.

Lukas felt a sharp pain as Herobrine grabbed his arm and threw him back. Lukas crashed into a pile of debris. Just barely managing to stay on the bride. He slowly got up, chest heaving. He looked at the tunnel beyond Herobrine.

The other glanced at it as well, "Do you honestly think you can get past me?"

"I've gotten this far!" Lukas spat.

Herobrine snarled. "Game over!"

Lukas ran.
He was promptly grabbed by his hair and slammed against the ground. Before he could get up, Herobrine took an arrow— the same one Lukas had used on him— and stabbed it down into the teen’s arm.

Lukas screamed in pain, feeling the head go all the way through.

"You're pathetic," Herobrine sneered, kneeling over him.

"I'm not the one who let a mortal get the best of me. I'm also not the one who left Alex and Steve to recover—"

Herobrine backhanded him, making Lukas cry out, "I will soon remedy that mistake. But first," He twisted his blade in his hand, "It seems your "friends" are going to be forever left wonder. What happened to you. What happened to Jesse."

Lukas didn't reply, he didn't beg. Herobrine wasn't going to get that satisfaction, through deep down he was terrified. He was going to die.

Herobrine lifted the blade.

Lukas closed his eyes.

"Gods they keep coming!"

"We have to keep fighting till we can move Jesse and Mariah!"

Reggie parried a witch, sending it to Bach who immediately sent the spawn to the ground in a splatter of blood. "I'm not sure how much longer I can last!"

Aiden was wheezing too, his lungs worn down and his arms felt heavier than the swords he carried. He grunted in pain as an enderman punched him in the shoulder, he turned spinning around to jab it in the jaw, "We're the only shot they have!"

Suddenly Bach froze, "Oh Notch save us."

Aiden looked, just beyond the wall he could see a wave of monsters, packed so tightly together he couldn't see the ground. Thousands of eyes glowed in the moonlight, full of hate and insanity.

He felt his heart seize and he looked over at Bach, who in turn was waiting for his reaction.

Aiden looked at the house behind them, then back to the wall.

"I'm supporting you," Reggie said softly.

Aiden slowly nodded, then looked at Bach. He nodded to the blacksmith, who returned the gesture.

Aiden braced his stance, "We hold the house."

The voice guided her to the bottom of the stairs and Petra burst out the door. She found herself amidst the one magnificent diamond mines... If only she had lived here on her diamond hunting spree, some small part of her thought.

A scream echoed through the minshafts like a knife, followed by the sound of metal screeching on stone.
"Lukas!" Petra went to run, but froze.

Which way?

*Notch, where do I go?*

"This way...."

Petra looked at tunnel, hesitating.

"*Petra go!*"

She raced forward, letting the voice guide her left, right, through the endless maze that was the mines,

A loud crash shook the tunnels and Petra noticed the area was getting brighter with the glint of lava light.

"That way."

"Play time is over!"

Herobrine!

Petra ran, one foot in front of the other. She had to get to Lukas, she *had* to.

Another scream, one of agony and pain.

"LUKAS!"

She rushed out into an open chasm, connected by dozens of bridges on various levels. Hers however – judging by the dust in the air and lack of bridge- had been recently demolished. She slid out, landing on her side, just barely able to stop before the ledge. Petra looked over the side, her breath freezing in her lungs.

Herobrine was kneeling over Lukas, the blonde's clothes were stained red in blood. His eyes were closed.

She was too late! He was-

No! Lukas was breathing, he was still alive!

Herobrine's sword was up in the air.

Petra didn't even blink twice, shoving herself off the ledge to the demigod below. "No!" she hit Herobrine's backside full force, his entire form lurching. His blade stabbed down, slamming into the stone floor, missing Lukas's head by centimeters.

Lukas's eyes shot open, "Petra?!" he cried.

Petra yanked on Herobrine's hair, "Get away from him!" she screamed, and she pulled out her dagger, stabbing it into his side.

Herobrine roared.

Petra pulled out the knife and stabbed again. Pull, stab, pull, stab she kept going, kept fighting. Lukas
shoved Herobrine off him, the later getting up and staggered away, Petra still on his back.

"I'm sick of you little pests!" Herobrine roared. He reached back, grabbing Petra by her tangled hair, and with a hard yank, pulled her over his shoulder. She screamed in pain at the immense wave of agony coursing through her skull. Herobrine threw her over, and slammed her down back first onto the stone. She gasped, the breath knocked from her lungs and her dagger slid out of her fingers as she was stunned.

Herobrine's blood poured out of his wounds, the injuries unable to heal due to the enchantments. His skin crackled and sizzled, the effect of the deity mode. Petra found herself staring up in the furious void that had become Herobrine's eyes as white turned to black.

"Nothing you can do will save him!" His fist curled.

Lukas slammed into Herobrine to the best of his ability, and he might as well have hit a brick wall. "Don't you dare touch her!" he had Petra's dagger, already swinging for Herobrine's wounded side.

He caught Lukas by the throat slamming him down of the ground, the blonde's head hit the ground with a sickening crack, and he went immediately lax.

"Lukas!" Petra cried.

Herobrine snatched the dagger up, twisting it around in his hand.

"No!" Petra rolled over Lukas, trying to shield him.

The daze snapped out of his eyes, and he looked up at her in horror, "Petra! No!"

There was a sickening sound, the sound of flesh and bone ravaged by blade. Petra flinched, waiting for the inevitable pain that would follow with the sound. Instead she felt a wet damp sensation splattering on the back of her neck.

Lukas gasped beneath her. "Steve!"

Petra looked over her shoulder, and sure enough, the Immortal was there, the diamond blade impaled through his forearm.

Steve slowly pushed up, teeth gritted in pain. His eyes flashed, the last of his deity strength fighting to hang on just a little longer. He grabbed hold of Herobrine's shoulder and hurled his brother. Sending the other flying into the pile of debris in at the other end of the bridge.

Herobrine shoved himself out of it, "You couldn't win then Steve! You can't win now!"

Steve slowly pulled the knife from his arm with his uninjured limb. The blade glistened with little rivers of ruby red. The skin and muscle making wet sounds of protests as the jagged blade pulled free. He dropped the blade to the floor. Blood splattering as it hit the stone.

"I have help this time," he snarled. "And you've lost your edge."

Herobrine growled, the dark voids of his eyes flashing briefly white. He lunged, snatching his weapon from the floor as he passed it. Steve lifted his hands, resummoning his own diamond blade, blocking just as Herobrine made impact.

Petra ducked pushing into Lukas as Steve flew over her and the male. The two immortals slamming into the opposite tunnel. The entire bridge shook, the wood groaning in protest.
Lukas pushed up, "Are you okay!"

She ran her fingers along the back of his messy hair, feeling the sticky blood in the locks. "I’m fine! Are you okay?"

He shakily nodded, flinching as Herobrine slammed once again into Steve.

Petra was up on her feet, snatching up her fallen dagger, "Come on we have to help!"

Lukas didn't argue, snapping the shaft of an arrow in his arm and yanking out the diamond head.

Petra ran for the battle, dodging as Steve was knocked down past her. She lunged at Herobrine, ducking under the blade, feeling the sharp edges slice at the edge of her hair and cutting the ginger tips free. Her dagger came down slamming hard and deep into Herobrine's thigh. She put her full weight into it feeling the blade crack the bone.

"AUGH!"

He grabbed her by the hair, yanking her head back, sword aiming for her throat-

Lukas was there stabbing the red stained diamond arrow head deep into his opponent's hand. Herobrine backhanded him in response, sending the youth sprawling to the floor. Steve came up again, only for Herobrine to catch him with his blade, Steve barely blocked, but it sent his own weapon into his shoulder. He cried out in pain, blood pooling from the wound immediately.

"Enough!" Herobrine roared.

There was an intense wave of air and heat and Petra felt herself flying back, landing hard on the ground opposite side of the bridge. Lukas flew past her, body sliding over the edge of the bridge.

"LUKAS!"

He caught the side of the wooden structure, hands tearing into the wood as he clawed onto it for purchase.

Steve went to get up, only for his brother to slam into him, pinning him full force against the wall.

"We are finishing this!" the later raged. He shoved his blade towards Steve's chest, full weight on the hilt.

Steve cried out, pressing his hands against the handle of the blade, pushing back as hard as he could. Blood burst forth from his arm wound, his racing heart and building pressure urging his precious lifeblood out.

"Petra help him!" Lukas cried.

Petra got up, scrambling for the pair.

Herobrine saw her coming and slammed his foot down, another heat wave once more knocking her back.

She landed hard, cracked wood and broken iron tearing into her hands.

Steve hissed in pain, the wave at such a close range making his arms buckle slightly. The tip of the blade sank into his chest, and Steve gasped out in pain.
Petra's breath hitched, no! She got up, running once again only for Herobrine to see her coming and sending her spiraling back with another wave.

How could she get to him?!

Lukas was half way back onto the bridge, "Petra the knife!"

Petra spotted her weapon on the floor, and snagged it up. Planting her feet firmly she raised it over her head. Steve's gift gleamed brightly in her hand. For a split second, Petra hesitated.

*What if I miss?*

She tightened her grip.

*I won't.*

Then with a roar, Petra threw the knife.

---

Aiden was on his back, there was a creeper right on top of him, skin flashing as it began to charge.

Reggie was screaming for him, and trying to get there.

Aiden's head fell back as another spawn hit him in the face, he looked through the swarms and the haze. Staring helplessly as a set of enderman marched up the blacksmith house stairs...

---

For a moment – only for a split second – the whole world seemed to slow.

Petra saw the knife leave her hand, droplets of sweat flicking off her fingers as the weapon was released. She could feel trickles of more sweat running down the back of her neck. She could feel the tears sticking to her eyelashes. There was ash and embers brushing against her skin…

Herobrine's blade was pressing into Steve's chest, the black diamond not even reflecting the lava all around. Lukas was jerking in surprise from the corner of her vision, her battle roar having surprised him. Even Steve himself lurched slightly, blood oozing from the growing wound as he moved.

Petra saw it all, in that split second. That whole moment, she prayed. Harder than she ever had in her life.

*Don't let me miss.*

The blade seemed to gleam.

Then by the next moment, everything was all a blur.

The knife flew lightning fast, spinning. It looked like a blue disk as it sailed through the air. It cut through the air currents radiating off Herobrine like a kitchen knife to butter

But would it make it?

What if it hit Steve?!

Herobrine froze, the air currents stopped.

The blade had sunk into the back of Herobrine's neck, embedding all the way to the hilt.
Petra's breath hitched. She had hit him!

Herobrine reached up, slowly pulling the blade free of his neck.

Her heart stopped, No! Die! Die!

He slowly turned his head, looking towards her. Steve shoved his brother off of him, yanking the black blade free of his grip. Steve spun it around. Herobrine lurched in a weak attempt to dodge, the blade imbedding itself into his stomach.

The dagger fell to the ground, vibrating on the stone.

Herobrine snarled the sound came out strange and foreign with the mangled throat. Blood ran from the wound on both sides. It stained the Dark One's shirt red on the front and back. His sword vanished and his grisly stomach wound poured out blood like thick water.

For a moment everything seemed to freeze, even the volcano itself went briefly silent

Herobrine snarled again, a dark fury in his eyes. He leaned a little closer to Steve, whose expression was grim, but eyes full of turmoiled emotion.

"I'll be back," Herobrine's voice was wet and gurgled. Blood pooled out of his lips, dripping off of his chin. Each syllable forced blood out of his desecrated throat.

"I know...." Steve said quietly.

Herobrine gripped his older brother's shirt, blood staining the damaged fabric, "You will...never be... safe. I'll.... k-kill all...of you."

Herobrine released his grip on Steve and staggered back, stopping centimeters from the bridge's edge.

"This.... isn't.... over."

Then with a feral growl, Herobrine toppled over the edge, almost as if it was intentional, falling to the inferno below.

The rumbling of the mountain snuffed out, and Aiden opened his eyes to see the spawns rapidly retreating. Some meeting their end as the no longer overwhelmed golems did their work.

Reggie pulled Aiden up, "They're retreating?"

Aiden looked to the mountain. The smoke reducing in the night.

\textit{He's gone...}

There was nothing.

Only the never tiring vibrations of the mountain. But Herobrine's rage was gone, the fury of the volcano died with him.

Lukas collapsed in his respective standing spot, exhaustion finally taking its claim. Petra slowly turned around to face him.
"You came back," Lukas said, shaking.

"You said we're saving this group," Petra replied weakly, "All means you too."

"But...you came back."

"Did you not want me to?" she aske, her tone dry but harmless.

Lukas let out a tear clogged laugh, "No, no, I just- I really thought that I-"He looked up at her, shakily standing, "Thanks Petra."

Petra gave him a weary smile and took a step towards him. "Oh!" her weakened legs gave out and she went to her knees. Lukas got onto bloody palms and crawled towards her. Petra reached out and pulled Lukas to her, the blonde not arguing as he fell into her embrace.

"No more splitting up," She sobbed.

"I've been saying that since the beginning," he replied, voice muffled by her hair.

"Yeah, well now I'm saying it, so now it's a rule." She sniffed.

Lukas let out another laugh, crying into her shoulder. He gave her a squeeze, "Whatever you say Petra."

She pulled away, "Steve are you okay?"

Steve was staring at the edge. Where Herobrine had been moments before. He mumbled something softly to himself. Then silently picking up the dagger he weakly walked over to the pair and handed it to Petra, "I'm sorry this happened," he said quietly.

"It's not your fault," Lukas said.

"If I had finished this when I should have..." He kneeled down and inspected them over, "Are either of you seriously hurt?"

"Are you?" Lukas asked instead.

"I'm bleeding internally, my ankle is broken and my arm just had a dagger go through it. But none of that will matter once I am clear of the enchantments." He got slowly up, cringing, "Come on, I know the way out, we need to get you two down the mountain."

They followed after, "Where is Alex?" Petra asked, "Did she get to Jesse?"

"Yes, now we need to hurry, or- "Steve stopped.

"Steve?"

The male was frozen, slowly lifting up his amulet with shaking hands. The stone glowed a rapid and harsh pulse, illuminating his hands.

Lukas looked at the stone, "Steve? What does that mean?"

Steve didn't answer, tears slowly falling down his face. He gripped the amulet shaking his head, "No....no no no!"

The fear that had receded, crept back into Lukas's core, and he stared at the pulsing blue stone.
"I need to be out there,"

"You are *hurt* sit still."

"But Lukas and Petra-"

"Reggie is getting together a search party. Now sit or I will sedate you," Ivor warned.

He watched as Aiden looked stressed towards the guest bedroom."What about Mariah-"

"Resting, she is fine."

Aiden pulled his bloody hands free of Ivor's grip, trying to stand, "Hero- *He* has to be gone, I *need* to find Lukas and Petra before-"

Ivor had to catch him as the younger male's knees gave out, lowering him back onto the bench, "Aiden you are hurt. No more fighting,"

"B-but-"

"They will find them."

Bach entered the room at the moment, he looked winded, and messy but still very focused on the status of his dear wife. "Ivor! Is Mariah alright?"

"She is fine, healthy too," Ivor assured.

Bach paused at the door, "The baby…"

Ivor just nodded to the door.

Bach opened it, gasping softly, "Mariah oh luv."

The female glowed from her bed, two infants in her arms, "We were both right Bach."

"Oh Mariah, we have twins?" he hurried to the bed, kissing her tenderly, "Oh Mariah."

Aiden smiled, though it was brief, he looked the other door, the entrance closed. "…Jesse?"

Ivor looked at the bedroom door as well. Once Alex had entered the room she hadn't left. Matthew came in and out a few times, and Ivor didn't want to tell Aiden that his expression was not promising. They hadn't even left the room since the battle cleared.

"I don't-"

The door slammed open and Matthew exited, throwing bloody rags to the floor, eyes filled to the brim with frustration. He looked at Ivor and Aiden "Pray to your deities," he whispered, voice full of pain and sorrow.

Ivor felt Aiden stiffen. "No."

"Is he not-"

Matthew shook his head.
Inside the room, Alex had stopped her tending, running her fingers through a limp Jesse's hair. Tears poured down her face, "Jesse, honey wake up."

Jesse, his skin stained red, the rest of it deathly pale, didn't respond.

Alex choked on a sob, "Jesse, baby. Come back." She gritted her teeth, "Baby I'm sorry, please just come back, Jesse! I'm sorry I'm sorry, I should have been there, I- let you down, I-" She pulled her son into her arms, he lay limp against her as she kissed his hair, running her fingers through the tresses. "Come back!"

But Jesse's head remained still against her breasts.

Alex let out a wail, screaming towards the heavens, "Notch give him back! Don't take him from me again! I can't- I- Give my baby back to me! Notch please! Don't take him from me again, don't take my Jesse I- I" - she broke into sobs, cradling Jesse close.

Shaking, Aiden got up, "I have to find them,"

Ivor followed, "Aiden wait!"

"They have to be here Ivor. Lukas and Petra need to need to-" Aiden's voice cracked and tears ran down bloody and filthy cheeks. "I wasn't fast enough Ivor. Now he's – he's-"

Ivor pulled the teen in as he sobbed, clinging onto his shirt with each body wracking cry.

"Give him back! Jesse, honey, please come back!" Alex continuously cried out, "Notch please! Jesse! Jesse baby! No, Jesse, please!" She clung tight to him, her child, her son, her Jesse.

The Healer was gone, the Immortal was too broken, it was only a mother that remained grieving now.

Ivor stood there, feeling stuck between two scenes. In one room, a couple, though filled with sorrow, silently rejoiced at the miracle of their two children and in the other…

A mother cried out to her deity to bring the boy, her child, back to her.
Art by Luna Destiny
A Change

The grass rustled against Jesse's skin, and the breeze blew on his face, but he did not open his eyes. He just lay there, slipping in and out of a limbo state.

"Jesse."

"Jesse come back..."

He shifted when he felt a wet sensation on his face, a kind of snort and sniffle, warm and fuzzy but just a little damp. He could hear the soft oinks, the little squeaks...

"Reu-

"Jesse back to me!"

"Come on kiddo let's go fishing today!"

"Please baby, wake up!"

"Alex? Alex!"

"No! Notch give him back!"

"PAPA!"

Jesse flinched, trying to open his eyes, trying to move. But he felt so sluggish, so tired. Everything was going white, he just wanted to sleep.

"Jesse, it's time to wake up."

Jesse's eyes finally opened, but it felt like it took an eternity to do so. The grass was gone, and so was the damp sensation on his cheek. The cotton sheets pooled around him, and the wood ceiling greeted him from above.

He was in the treehouse.

"I'm back?"

"Not exactly."

Jesse sat up, once more spotting the man from before. He was seated once again at the table, he was shuffling a deck of cards.

"Hello Jesse," he said.

"Hello..." Jesse replied, "Notch."

Notch smiled, a slight spark in his eye. He extended his cards, "Care for another game?"

Jesse got out of the bed, and settled down in the opposite side of the table. "Did I make the right choice?"

"I informed you that there was no wrong choice in that situation."
"I understand now that I was literally choosing life and death back there."

"You are one of the few who have had that option," Notch finished shuffling, "You go first."

Jesse took his stack and laid down the first card. "So, there was no wrong option?"

"No, only your opinion mattered."

"I feel like you influenced,"

Notch raised an eyebrow, curious, "Oh?"

"Well, showing me Olivia and Axel, isn't that kind nudging?"

The elder placed down a card, "It was either a hello or a goodbye, depending on your choice. I wasn't influencing you, I just thought you might like to see them. Considering it might have been your last time."

"Then why am I back here?" Jesse said, "I chose to go back to – well my body. How am I back at the Crossroads?"

"We are no longer at the Crossroads. You did go back, but you didn't stay."

"What do you mean?"

Notch silently lowered his cards, "Even when we do choose to return to the fight Jesse, even when we fight as hard as we can….We can still lose."

Jesse froze, "Wait… do you mean…"

Notch sighed, "Time may have been different in the Crossroads, how long it took you to make your decision did not affect the time in the mortal realm. But your body was still badly wounded Jesse."

He looked at him, his eyes having lost their spark, "Far greater than I thought in fact, Herobrine may have missed your vitals on purpose, but his power is deadly."

"You- you mean," Jesse's fingers gripped the table, "You mean I died?"

"…Yes."

Jesse swallowed, his throat thick. "So, I'm- I'm gone then? Where am I now? The Aether?"

"No, no," Notch shook his head, "You were there for a short time, but you are not any longer."

Jesse stared, very confused.

"You did die Jesse, despite choosing to go back, you did die." Notch sighed.

"You keep saying 'did'."

"Many ages ago, I heard the prayer of hundreds, crying out for me as Herobrine destroyed their home. They begged me to come down, to stop him. But when I created this world, I created people to plow their own path. I cannot interfere with independent souls. It is not my right;"

"But you still had the power to do so," Jesse asked.

Notch sadly smiled, "But would that be right?"
"No….I suppose not."

"But unlike that night all those eons ago, this time it was very different. They did not cry for themselves, or vengeance or for salvation. Hundreds of voices once again cried out to me, but they cried for you." Notch looked up at Jesse, "They begged be to bring you back. So yes, you *did* die Jesse."

"You mean you…"

"You will not be joining me in the Aether just yet. Uno."

A wave of guilt washed over Jesse. "But, what about other people? Why let me come back? Why save me? That's breaking your own rule, isn't it?"

The deity drew a few more cards before he answered, "No one died that night Jesse, there were many people hurt, but you were the only one to die. I cannot explain my reasoning for bringing you back, and yes, I did break my own rule. However, there is a future ahead Jesse. A future that needs you." He laughed at Jesse's expression, "Don't look at me like that, the future is a wonderful thing."

"I suppose," Jesse looked out the window. "Are we not at the Crossroads then?"

"No, we are inside your mind. Your body is healing right now as we speak. You'll probably have a scar. But you're healing quickly, perk of being brought back." Notch frowned at his deck, eyebrows furrowing together. "But I am to inform you that Reuben is quite happy with your choice. He is glad you went through he does miss you. He also says you need to take better care of yourself."

Jesse chuckles, just a little. Tears trickling out for the millionth time it seems. But they were happy tears this time, "I miss him so much right now."

"I know but he is happy you decided to keep fighting," the elder hummed, he watched Jesse stiffly put down a card, "How are you feeling?"

"Honestly," Jesse took a moment to access the pain throughout his body, "I'm in agony."

"Good, that means you are closer to being alive than you are dead."

Jesse thought back on the numbed sensations he felt in the Crossroads, how the closer he had gone to the exit containing Reuben the less he felt. "Did you know what I was going to pick?"

"I see many things Jesse, but what a living soul will choose I cannot see. It is not my job to control their actions, remember?"

"I think you're more involved than you let on," Jesse said. "I remember a lot more now. I recognize your voice from the woods. You guided me to the cabin." He held up two fingers, "You also were the one talking to me by the river, you said I needed to be here. You were probably in the storm that helped us get away from Herobrine the first time. You were trying to warn us. I bet, you were also the feeling Petra had that we needed to go through the First World door."

Notch smiled slightly.

"You can't tell me you didn't nudge or influence just a little bit."

The other shrugged, "Alright, certain things needed to be put into motion. So, I 'nudged'."

Jesse leaned back, "Did you know Herobrine would be involved in all of this? That he was going to
attack Steve and Alex?"

"It wouldn't be the first time he's done so. They have crossed paths many times over the ages." Notch answered, "But no, I did not foresee it. I certainly, didn't see him striking you down either. I wouldn't have brought you here had I known. His form as Brine kept him just as well hidden from me as it did Steve. I only became aware far too late, and I could only warn you the best I could."

"Why didn't you warn Steve?"

"I'm afraid Steve and I have not spoken for quite a long time."

"Why?"

"Many things in life have driven us apart, what happened to his brother for starters."

"He asked you to take his immortality away, I remember the dream- the vision."

"I couldn't do it, I tried to explain to Steve what he asked of me. But his heart had been greatly wounded, he did not see through his pain and rage. I pointed him to where he could find the means to do what he wished, thought it hurt me do so."

"I remember, he couldn't do it. Even with all his rage and hate, Herobrine was his brother."

"I'm afraid he understood that too late." Notch said softly. "We like to believe we can kill just one person to save the many…But what if it's family? Could you, do it? After the incident we spoke very rarely and then not at all after…..well..."

"But Herobrine came back," Jesse flinched, catching the sadness in his tone. "Herobrine set a trap for them. Are they alright? Is everyone okay?"

Notch snapped a finger and the window once again into a foggy picture.

Jesse recognized the inside of Steve and Alex's home immediately. It was the kitchen. Alex was stirring her big cauldron over the fire. She was covered in bandages from head to toe. Her thick long hair resting matted around her shoulders. Her usually vibrant green eyes were dull and marred with tear lines. She leaned heavily on a cane as she cooked, a weak smile on her lips as she spoke with-

"Ivor?!"

"He showed up shortly after you went to face Herobrine."

Jesse leaned in, inspecting the scene closer. Ivor talked with Alex, his eyes clouded in worry. Jesse could tell by his posture he was asking all of his scientific questions, possibly asking Alex about her immortality and such. A simple conversation to ease the air. The female seemed accepting of the questions, anything to sooth.

Petra and Aiden were at the other end of the room, seated on the living room sofa. They sat close to each other, chatting amongst themselves. Their postures were stiff. Petra had cuts and bruises on her skin. Aiden looked a little worse, his leg was wrapped up, the cotton pants -probably given by Alex- hanging loosely over the bandages. They were both fine, but Jesse could see Petra's worry signs around the corner of her eyes. She tried her best to stay calm as Aiden did his best to sooth.

The picture adjusted, and Jesse could see inside Alex's medical room. It was a little hard to see inside, the door was mostly closed. But he could see Lukas sitting on a recliner chair, fast asleep. He had pulled it close to the bed, his upper body leaning forward as he rested on the comforter. His sleep
was clearly fitful as one hand rested on the bed owner's arm.

Jesse blinked, "I'm staring at myself."

It was indeed him, lying unconscious on the bed.

"I understand that might be a strange perspective." Notch hummed, removing the picture.

"Wait!"

"What?"

"Where was Steve?" Jesse asked nervously, "I didn't see him. Where is…"

Notch raised an eyebrow.

Jesse leaned back, sliding down the bench a bit, "Is he okay?" he asked quietly.

"I can tell you he is alive. But I don't know where he is at the moment. I'd check on him, but as stated before he and I…” Notch laid down a card, "I'm sure he's alright. He's probably out clearing his head. He's got a lot to process right now. You both do."

"So what Herobrine said….Steve and Alex…"

"They are your parents, yes."

*Parents.*

The word sounded foreign and unusual. But it was easier to accept that it had been the first time.

"Herobrine wasn't lying then," Jesse said quietly, looking blankly at the cards in his hands.

"No. When the truth hurts more, Herobrine will use it. He knew this would affect you deeply."

"I … I know he wasn't lying, I can feel this is the truth," Jesse cringed, "I just….I wish I knew… why didn't they…"

"I can't answer that Jesse." Notch said quietly.

Jesse looked out the window, "I guess this changes everything, knowing they're my family."

"Not at all." Notch replied.

Jesse looked back, confused.

"Steve is your father, Alex is your mother, and you are their son," Notch explained. "It changes nothing between the three of you. The only change is what you make of it." He reached across, setting a hand on Jesse's own, "You must know they loved you Jesse, very much. And they would have done anything to keep you. Because not too many years ago, I did speak with them, like I speak with you now. They had a choice too, and they chose you."

"A choice? You mean like the one I had at the Crossroads?"

"They thought they lost you Jesse. It killed them inside."

Jesse went quiet, "I don't know what to do with this."
"You are in a special position," Notch said, "You have had much in your life. You have had love and family in a one of a kind form that many do not see. You are in the unique position to define what your family is."

Jesse frowned, "That's...I don't understand,"

Notch smiled, running fingers through his hair, "You will soon. But for now we must part." He looked down, "It also seems you've won."

Jesse looked as well, noticing all his cards were gone, "Wait where are you going?"

"I'm going nowhere Jesse, you're waking up."

The cards and the table vanished slowly along with the rest of the room. Jesse stood, "Will I be seeing you again?"

Notch cupped the sides of his face, placing a kiss on his forehead, "If all goes well Jesse much time will have passed before you and I meet again." He smiled, "You will find home Jesse, I wish you the best of luck."

Jesse smiled.

"Oh, and one small thing?"

"Yes?"

"Do ask Steve to stop calling me old." Notch laughed.

The deity then gave him a hug and the room faded to white.

Jesse slowly opened one eye, taking notice quite quickly that his whole body felt on fire, and it hurt very, very, much to move.

He could hear Ivor outside the bedroom, still speaking with Alex.

He opened the other eye, blinking rapidly to allow his eyes to adjust. The room wasn't bright, it just hurt to open his eyes at the moment.

He shifted.

The sudden movement woke Lukas up, who still remained well and faithful by the bedside. The male's eyelids fluttered open in confusion, sleepily glancing over, "Jesse!" he smiled, eyes lighting up as he was immediately awake.

Jesse smiled weakly, "Hey," he cringed at how hoarse his voice was. "What's up?"

Lukas looked ready to cry as he sat up, squeezing Jesse's hand. "Oh you know," his voice cracked slightly, "Just doing what everyone else is doing and trying not to die."

He immediately spotted the bandages wrapped around Lukas's throat, and the patch on his jaw, "What happened to you!"

Lukas twiddled his fingers in the bed sheets, "Herobrine tried to cut my head off. Don't worry though! Alex treated it, she says it will heal just fine. It probably won't even scar."
"Why did he do that?!"

"I might or might not have shot him a few times with Alex's diamond arrows. Also might have insulted his godliness..."

Jesse frowned, gingerly sitting up, "I guess swearing on Notch meant nothing to him then."

"No, it did," Lukas said helping Jesse adjust. "He swung his sword at me when I pissed him off. I guess when he hit me; it broke the deal off with you. Aiden told us about the arrangement, he said you gave up the Witherstorm's power as long as he didn't hurt any of us." he gestured to his throat, "The moment he gave me this he lost it in a second."

"I'm glad you're okay. But he must have been furious."

Lukas's eyes shifted to the window and he slowly nodded, "Yeah, he was pretty pissed. I triggered his...I'll explain later. But yeah, you have no idea how mad he was."

"Did...I'm mean you're here- so...is he." Jesse couldn't continue.

"Die?" Lukas slowly responded, he rubbed his arm, which Jesse noticed was also wrapped up. "Kinda. Petra threw a knife through his throat. Then he fell into lava. But according to Steve that didn't kill him permanently. A stab through the heart was the only way for the enchantments to kill him for good, which didn't happen. Alex says he'll just respawn in another world. He'll be back someday."

Jesse's heart skipped a beat, but he forced himself to smile, "I'm just glad you are all okay."

Lukas's eyes watered again, and he gently hugged Jesse, "I'm just glad you are alive. We were really worried."

Jesse reluctantly returned the hug, feeling unworthy of the affection.

Lukas pulled away and stood, "I'll go get the others, they'll want to know you are awake."

He crossed the room and pushed the door open. "Hey guys-" the male wasn't beyond the room three seconds when Petra and Ivor hurried in taking Lukas back with them.

"Jesse!" They cried.

"You're awake!" Petra landed on the bed, coming to rest on Jesse's legs, "Sweet Notch you're okay! How are you feeling man?!"

"Ow," Jesse responded, then laughing as Petra quickly readjusted herself.

"Sorry! Sorry!" she said, "We were just worried sick."

"I understand that I was in pretty bad shape."

Petra squeezed his hand, "When Lukas and I got down the mountain, you were...you were." Tears threatened to sneak out the corner of her eyes, "We thought we lost you, I don't know how you came back.

*Help*, Jesse thought.

"After you were revived you relapsed back into an unconscious state," Ivor said, lowering himself onto Lukas's former chair. "It's been a few days now."
"Sorry I was..." Jesse paused, "Mentally figuring things out."

Petra let out a shaky exhale, "Oh, come're!" she hugged him, holding his shoulders tight as she was careful to avoid his injury. "I missed you." she whispered.

"You're healing fairly quickly, but how are you feeling?" Ivor asked.

"I feel pain mostly."

"Fair enough."

Jesse's eyes shifted to the door as Petra pulled out of the embrace. Aiden was leaned against the wooden frame, watching the pack. "I'm sorry to have dragged you into all of this," Jesse said.

Aiden shrugged casually, "Sorry you had to save me."

"I would have done it even if we hated each other. I just feel bad you got hurt."

"Yeah well," Aiden rubbed his throat, and pushed off the door frame. He stopped next to Lukas, "I'm going to have to stay here for a bit to make sure I'm not going to suffer from any volcanic poison effect. But I'll take that over being the psycho's pin cushion. He did a number on you. I wasn't messed up that bad."

Lukas elbowed Aiden, "He helped a lot Jesse. We had to build a ladder to use a bridge to get to you and he went first. Aiden was the one who carried you down the mountain while Petra went back for me. I also heard he and Reg defended Bach's house while the doctor was treating you and Mariah was in labor."

Jesse's eyebrows shot up, "What?"

"She had twins!" Petra grinned, "Ivor helped deliver the babies."

Ivor shrugged, "It wasn't too stressful." he coughed.

Petra scoffed, "Sure, you were delivering premature twins, while Aiden and Reg fought off an army of spawns. That isn't stressful at all." she winked at Jesse, "Ivor is now their godfather and while they had a name for the girl - Alexia- they named the boy after Aiden."

Aiden blushed a little, "It was nothing, Lukas and Petra over here are the ones who took on you know who."

"If you can call running for my life taking on," Lukas said dryly. "Petra is the one who actually hurt him." His eyes lit up, "Now that you should have seen Jesse. I'm on my back right? I think I'm going to die, and it turns out Petra followed me all the way down to the mines and..."

As the story trailed on, Jesse glanced out the bedroom door. Alex was opening the kitchen door, Steve walking wearily into the building, covered in bandages and still healing wounds.

The older male kissed Alex gently on the cheek, giving her his best but still broken smile. She did likewise, but both seemed very sad deep down. Steve made eye contact with Jesse and uncomfortably shifted on his legs. Both adults each giving him polite smiles to mask their unease.

Jesse stared back a moment; staring at the two people who had made this journey a little easier to bear. Two people who had explored, trained, and simply talked with him.

His parents.
"Jesse?" Petra asked.

"Hmm," he said, looking away from the kitchen.

Petra was rubbing one of his arms, "We're all pretty scrapped up. Steve said we're allowed to stay here to heal...But we all thought it should be up to you, because well...You know. We can try to make it to Ground Town or just stay here."

Jesse thought on it, and then he glanced slightly at the door where Steve and Alex were beyond. "I really don't think I should be moving just yet. Ground Town is really far away and that's a long walk. Let's just stay here."

Everyone nodded.

'There is something else," Aiden said, "Um, Jesse? I told everyone what happened. What Hero- He said to you. Jesse, he was lying."

Jesse flinched, knowing exactly what Aiden was bringing up. He looked away.

"Jesse, I'm...I'm not friends with you because you have some ancient god's blood in your DNA or whatever," Aiden explained. "I'm friends with you because...because you gave me a chance."

Jesse looked back.

"You kept trying to be the good person, a friend, after everything I did to you. Who tries to befriend someone who pushes them off a floating city?! I wouldn't. But you kept trying. You had me at your mercy, you could have ended it and you didn't. You encouraged me to start over," He glanced at Lukas, "You helped me repair what I had damaged, and you kept supporting me. I am forever grateful to you for that. You have no idea how much it meant to me... That's why you're my friend Jesse. It's because you were there."

"The same goes for me," Ivor said, "I mean, my grudge nearly destroyed the world we lived in. But you gave me a home in town and you were supportive and kind. It's doesn't have anything to do with who or where you come from. It's your heart Jesse," Ivor placed a hand on his shoulder, "It's how you've treated everyone."

"Lukas and I follow you because we felt that same thing off you," Petra said, "Sure we haven't known you very long. But good friends don't have to come from years of being together. You are an amazing person Jesse. You're funny, awesome, super sweet, and it's hard not to be attracted to that. You are our friend."

Tears pooled in Jesse's eyes, "But...I hurt you. What I said at the temple. I'm sorry I- I didn't-"

Lukas sat down on the bed, "We know you didn't. We know you were trying to protect us from him. I know...after Reuben, things have been hard, and with Axel and Olivia not around you might feel alone sometimes. But Jesse," he squeezed his hand, "We're here for you. We can help if you need us. You don't have to be alone, we're not trying to replace your old friends, but we want you to know we are still a team, all of us."

Jesse looked down crying, " I'm sorry for what I said," he looked back at them all, tears blurring his vision. "But I get it now, and I can't thank all of you enough for coming back to get me, for coming back to save me. I really am blessed, I may be stuck traveling, but I'm stuck with you and that's okay by me."

Petra smiled, "From now on, we're a team. We have each other's backs."
Jesse nodded, "We have each other's backs. I won't close up anymore, we're going to find home. Together."

"Group hug!" Petra cried.

"Don't hurt his stitches!" Lukas said.

Aiden yelped as Ivor reached out and pulled him into the pack, "You too stoic."

Jesse cried as they embraced him, it was hot tight and smothering. It didn't replace Axel or Olivia...

But in its own way it was still perfect.

"It's going to be okay Jesse," Lukas soothed. "We're going to be okay."

Jesse smiled nodding. He looked through the tangled mass of arms and hair out the bedroom.

Steve was whispering something to Alex, before silently departing back out the front door. Alex reluctantly let him go, her hand slipping out of his fingers. She reached up clutching her amulet.

She spotted Jesse staring at her and gave a polite smile.

Jesse's heart clenched.

It wasn't quite fully okay, yet.

There was still something he had to do.
The next few weeks that followed were fairly uneventful. Jesse spent most of his time resting. Just like Notch had said, he was healing fast, a perk of being revived by a deity. But he was still very weak at most times, confined to either the bedroom or the living room.

Ivor stayed at the house as well, mostly to ask Steve and Alex questions about the different worlds they had visited, and their experiences as the Immortals.

Lukas and Petra took turns staying at the house with Jesse, or training, while the other went with Aiden to help around the repairing village.

Steve and Alex remained relatively busy, most of their time was spent helping their home town. This took time, conditions were no longer favorable, with winter now closed in upon the town. Steve and Alex were also still slowly healing from their battle with Herobrine, the enchantments doubled with the extensive power used in their deity states left little remaining energy to heal quickly.

They spoke with Jesse on occasion, and they did spend time with him. But they respectfully kept their distance for the most part. They never spent any alone time with him, someone else was always in the room.

It took a few weeks before Jesse realized they were afraid to. Despite Jesse's constant hints that he bore no grudge, or resentment; Steve and Alex deep down were ashamed. They pictured themselves as a failure in his eyes.

It left Jesse feeling stuck on how he could tell them that it was okay, that he was okay. But they never were alone, they couldn't bring themselves to do it.

So, he was rather surprised when Steve actually spoke to him as Jesse sat by himself one crisp winter morning. Winter was in full force now; the snow was on the ground, the First World had gone into a sleep. It wasn't very early in the morning, rather late actually. But winter kept the light to itself.

"You should be in bed resting…"

Jesse stopped swinging on the porch swing. He adjusted his jacket, a gift from Alex when they had to visit a snow biome temple. He tightened it around himself, adjusting the fur lining. "I'm sorry, but I've been cooped up so long. I needed fresh air."

Steve closed the front door, puffs of hot air escaping his mouth each time he breathed out into the brisk winter air, "It's freezing out here though."

Jesse adjusted his jacket awkwardly again, "I'm sorry. I was just going stir crazy. I'll go back in if you want me to."

"It's fine, it's really up to you." Steve softly laughed, "I understand."

He looked at the adult, slowly inspecting him up and down, "What's with the walking stick and backpack?"

Steve looked at his gear, "One last hike before the winter really sets in…." He hesitated. "Umm…"
"Yes?"

"Would you like to come with me? Are you feeling well enough to walk?"

"Really?" Jesse glanced into the house, knowing everyone else was probably still asleep. "No one will freak out if they wake up and find me gone?"

"Alex is awake," Steve looked into the house as well, "If you go get a scarf, I'll go in and tell Alex the plan."

He stood, excited that Steve seemed comfortable enough to spend time with him again. He hurried in the house while Steve went to fill Alex in. Steve was already outside, by the time he came back, readjusting his pack on is shoulder.

" Alright, where are we going?"

Steve hopped off the porch, "An old place of mine."

Jesse followed and together the pair trekked off. They went past the village- its lights all out as its residents slept. They went over the bridge, and down the road in the direction of the Portal. The river quietly made its way along under the bridge vanishing into the woods.

They walked about a mile, maybe two; it was a slow progress. Jesse still wasn't up to full par, and Steve wasn't exactly running a marathon either. So, they stayed their own pace, the time passing by as they trekked. After the second mile or so, Steve suddenly veered off the road and into the woods. There was no path, no marked trail….

"How do you know the way?"

"I'll never forget it. I may not be able to remember a lot of things with thousands of years of memories…" Steve said quietly, "There may be no more path, but I can still see it in my own way."

"Last time I was here," Jesse said, "I was apparently lost of hours. It only felt like a few minutes though."

"This forest started when this world was made, it is very old." Steve explained, "Old and full of magic. I suppose it can mess with whatever and whomever it wants."

They walked quietly for some time, only the crunch of snow under their boots. The forest itself was very quiet. The only sound was Steve humming a tune. He occasionally sang a word or two, "If all the snowflakes…. were candy bars and milkshakes…." The song eventually trailed off but the hike continued. The sun had risen over the horizon, lighting up the sky highlighting the vibrant blues. The entire forest started to glow in bright whites, stark black shadows making patterns in the snow. It was pristine and perfect, not a track was in sight. The trees without their leaves stood like silent guardians all around. It was hard to believe that this was the same dark and scary forest from all that time before.

It was so beautiful.

"I like this time of year," Steve said suddenly, "Most of the spawns like to hibernate. It's nice and quiet."

"I can't imagine not having spawns around," Jesse replied. "This world really is one of a kind."
"It is…"

Steve pointed to a spot in the frozen river. "That's a good place to fish, trout are big and the spiders are few."

Jesse froze.

"Come on kiddo! Let's go fishing today!"

Steve noticed Jesse's footsteps skip a tempo, he looked back, "You alright kid- Jesse? Do we need to stop?"

"No, no, I'm okay."

Steve stared a second longer before nodding and looking back forward.

Jesse paused, biting his lip. "Actually…steam?"

"Hmmm?"

"Can- can you tell me what happened that day?"

"What day?"

"The day you…." Jesse trailed off.

Steve stopped walking, "Oh." He said quietly, "That day." He started walking again.

"Look I understand if you don't want to talk about it but-

"No no…." Steve stopped walking again, he sighed heavily, "It isn't a matter of if I want to or not….Maybe we should sit down for a bit."

Jesse settled down on a nearby stump "Can you?" he asked as Steve took of his pack and leaned into a tree.

"I guess you more than anyone deserves to know." Steve replied, "It feels like forever ago now. But I guess it started out like any normal day…."
Steve shook his head, but he was laughing. With all the racket his son made, it was a wonder they caught any fish at all.

"Wreel!" Jesse cried.

"Yes, reel, very good."

Steve easily pulled the bass from the river, roughly five pounds. Not too big, but still good, "Look at what you caught Jesse." Jesse giggled, clapping those little hands in delight.

Steve set Jesse onto the ground next to him, and grabbed his net, "How about we take all this to Mommy eh Jesse?" Steve turned around, the fish wiggling in the net, "Gah! Jesse!"

His son was head first in the bucket, doing some fishing of his own.

Steve dropped his pole and scooped his son out, "Jesse!"

Water ran down the toddler's head, out his nose and mouth, but he let out a bubbling wave of laughter, "Phish!"

Steve let out a relieved breath, "Okay time to go home I think."

Jesse cheered, wiggling eagerly. Steve set him down and the youngster burst off into a adorable waddle towards his horses, Apollo and Artemis. Steve shook his head for the hundredth time, and released his last catch into the bucket; closing and locking the lid.

At the horses, Jesse was already trying to climb up Artemis. The beast was patient, having gotten used to the youth's antics long ago.

Steve stood and nearly tripped as his first step was met with a irritated squeak. He looked down, giving Reuben a slight frown. The piglet wiggled at him, knowing full well he was under Jesse's loving protection.

Steve had planned to get rid of the runt by merely setting him free when Reuben was big enough to survive on his own. But Jesse thought he was going to kill the animal, and like scene out of some child's book, Jesse would have none of it. Now the pair were inseparable, Reuben often rubbing it in, and Steve couldn't do a damn thing.

Not that he minded really.

He attached the bucket to Apollo, all while Jesse babbled away down below. He picked up Reuben next, the little piglet squealing a little. But he settled down once on the back of the horse. Steve then scooped up Jesse and resting him on his hip, made his way towards Artemis.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Yeah!"

Steve jumped up, Jesse screaming in delight and landed on their horse. Artemis grunted slightly, looking back at Steve, not amused. She looked forward again after he gave her an apologetic shrug.

"Go!" Jesse cheered.

Artemis moved forward as commanded, careful not to go too fast. She kept a steady trot, enough to pacify Jesse and keep Steve at ease. They did not need to ride the horses, not really. The house was only about three miles away. Honestly Steve probably would have been faster on foot, but Jesse just
adored those horses. It allowed him time to enjoy the scenery anyway.

Alex's hunch about this world had been correct. It was full of beauty and potential. Like all worlds it had its spawns of course, but they were rarer here, and less aggressive than the ones in the First World. It was a great place to raise the crazy child of two equally crazy Immortals.

Steve glanced down at Jesse. The boy happily talked away to Artemis. Even though the horse could never speak back it didn't seem to bother either of them. Steve wondered casually if Jesse would always be good with animals no matter how long or brief his life would be.

Would his son be an Immortal as well?

Three things happened in that next moment.

The forest was deathly quiet, Steve noticed, save for the distant rumble of a far but quickly approaching storm. Reuben suddenly let out a terror filled squeal, cutting though the silence like a knife. So loud and prominent in fact, it even stopped Jesse's talking. Artemis and Apollo stopped, nearly knocking Steve off at the sudden halt.

"Artemis, move," Steve urged his horse forward.

The animal refused to budge.

Letting out a heavy sigh, Steve slid off, "Hang tight okay Jesse?"

Steve grabbed the reigns and began walking. Artemis and Apollo followed, but they were reluctant. Artemis kept trying to turn around, but Steve's firm grip on the reigns stopped her. His horses had never acted in such a way before. He'd owned both since they were born. Steve knew they were as loyal as they come.

He should have known right then, that there was something wrong…

But he didn't.

Steve stopped at the clearing of his home. A comfortable little wooden cabin, on a small patch of farm land. Artemis was tugging on the reigns, frantic, angry.

The silence had his attention now.

But it was the unhinged door of his house that made his heart stop.

Steve drew his sword, leaving Jesse with the horses, knowing it would be safer for him if there was an intruder inside. He stepped into the threshold, moving around the crooked door. "Alex? He pushed the door a little wider to squeeze all the way in. It opened with an aching groan, the hinges bent and barely holding.

"Alex?" he repeated, a little more urgently this time.

The lack of answer only heightened his fears.

The living room was a disaster, furniture toppled from one corner to the other-

Blood, there was blood staining the wall.

"Alex?!"
Steve ran into the kitchen, but he slid out on the tile, crashing and landing hard into a thick puddle of blood. "No!" It was everywhere, staining the tile and the walls. But his beloved wife was nowhere to be found. Steve scrambled up, blood staining his hands and clothes, "Al-"

"She's gone Steven…"

The Immortal froze at the living room entrance. He slowly turned around. "Herobrine." He snarled out.

Casually sitting on the stair rail leading upstairs, Herobrine was putting his shirt back on. It was covered in blood stains and slash marks. He popped his head through the upper hole, lifting part of the shirt up to wiggle his fingers through one of the holes in the desecrated fabric, "She's kinda a pain with the kitchen knife…"

Steve said nothing, just barely but nervously glancing towards the front door, knowing his son was outside.

"So, where is the little bundle of joy brother dear?"

He glared, "What?"

Herobrine smiled, "It has been a few years since we've last seen each other. Last I checked – before you kindly collapsed that water temple on me- you and Alex were planning on starting a family." His smile dropped, "I warned you Steve what would happen if you did."

"We have no child-"

"Liar," The demon pointed upstairs, "Already found the bed and the clothes. Frankly, I'd prefer if we'd go back to our three-player game. I let you keep Alex, but a child…” he tsked, "But tell me anyway, do I have a niece or a nephew?"

"You haven't been a part of my family for a long time," Steve said coolly, "Should I choose to start a family it is not in your power to decide. Now," He tensed, his sword catching fire, "I suggest you leave."

Herobrine faked hurt, the white orbs glinting. "I thought we were special? Guess I'm going to have to get my point across the hard way," he sighed. "You can't stop me Steve, I will kill your child." He looked towards the front door, "Wouldn't happen to be outside, would they?"

Steve roared and lunged, grabbing the fire poker from the smoldering fireplace. Herobrine whipped his head back forward. He barely blocked Steve's sword on its down swing, but was unable to stop the poker from meeting his eyes.

"Augh!"

Steve swung the poker up, then down, impaling Herobrine in the leg leaving him pinned and blinded on the stair rail. It didn't stop him from trying to attack though. He swung out, nearly catching Steve in the throat with his own knife.

Steve fell back and out the door, scrambling away.

"You can't run!" Herobrine roared, as Steve fled his home.

Steve lit his hands on fire and with one heave launched a wave of fire towards his home. It went up like a torch as the inferno hit, the heat wave rolling out of the explosion was immense.
Jesse wailed, startled by the fire and the blood covering Steve.

Steve scooped his son off the horse, snapping the reigns off the post. He grabbed Reuben next, freeing Apollo as well. The horses bucked in a frenzy as they fled. Steve trained them as loyal as he could, but even his best could never face the monstrosity inside his burning home.

A whistle of a blade caught his attention, nearly muffled as Jesse released a blood curling wail. Steve ducked, Herobrine's sword embedding itself into the tree behind him. He turned to face his burning home, despaired to see Herobrine had survived the inferno.

The dark Immortal crawled from the door, his flesh burned and his leg bleeding profusely. He looked up at Steve, his eyes seared and damaged, but his body was slowly mending, "Too weak," he rasped out through burnt vocals.

Jesse sobbed in his ear.

Herobrine stood, pulling the poker from his leg. "Not lethal enough."

Reuben screeched.

"Fight….or run Steve?" Can you beat me and protect your child at the same time? Can you spare their fate?" Herobrine spat out a mouthful of blood.

"Papa!"

Steve turned and fled.

The boulder missed Steve by only inches, and that was only because he was holding onto Jesse.

Steve rolled, keeping his son and the pig tucked close he slid down a muddy bank and backed into a small river cave. Thunder roared, lightning flashed and rain poured down in pelting waves, all the while Jesse wailed.

'Shhh, shhhhh." His wife's blood had long since been washed from his clothes and skin, having been blasted off by the rainstorm. But Jesse was still in a state of terror no matter how much he tried to sooth, "Jesse, it's okay, we're okay."

His son still cried, adding on to the deafening gale. The trauma was burned deep into Jesse.

He was only so lucky that Herobrine could see as little as Steve could hear at the moment. Damaging his eyes always left the Dark Immortal disoriented and angry. He was shooting in the dark, attacking only where he could pick up a sound. The few times Herobrine had been close, Jesse's enchantment protected them both.

He couldn't keep this up forever though. Herobrine would eventually corner him, and even Steve wasn't sure how effective the enchantments could be for Jesse.

Another chunk of something hit somewhere outside, shaking the small damp cave. Jesse wailed, clinging to Steve as tight as his little fingers allowed.

"Shh, Jesse it's okay." Steve soothed, he untucked his amulet, rubbing the stone till it glowed. "See? We're okay." His son whimpered, grasping onto the glowing blue piece of jewelry.

"I know you're close brother dear~"
Steve stiffened as Herobrine's calm and even voice cut through the gale. "I know you're here~" The top of the ceiling cracked and Steve fled the cave just as it collapsed in on itself.

He took a running leap, lunging across the river rapids.

"Gotcha!"

Steve felt something solid hit him in the back and he cried out in pain, Jesse screamed as he toppled forward. He tucked his son and the piglet close, but at the cost of making his landing. Steve landed hard, rolling and smashing into a tree on the opposite side of the river.

Herobrine tore up rock from his side of the water, "Nowhere to run now!" he roared, hurling the masses of debris at the trio. Steve tucked Jesse close, covering his head.

The rock shattered inches from them, scattering everywhere and hitting everything save for Jesse. Herobrine's expression twisted into one of confusion and rage, "What is this?!" he demanded. The immortal being took a running sprint and leapt over the rapids.

Steve scrambled up and mentally forced the water to bend to his will. Tendrils of ice cold river water shot from the rushing currents, snapping around Herobrine's waist and yanking him into the water.

The river froze over in an instant, the surface beginning to crack like glass. Steve turned and fled. He didn't have anywhere safe to run, they were on a mountain, he could tell by the terrain there were only cliffs and steep drops ahead. Behind him the river shatters ice shooting into the heavens. But Steve didn't look back, he found the first edge and without taking a second glance held his child and Reuben close and jumped.

"You can't run forever Steven!"

Steve waited till the pair turned their horses and left the clearing before he too turned his back and moved away.

_I promise I'll come back for you Jesse._

Leaving his child with two complete strangers was not ideal. But Steve could sense goodness in their hearts. He knew Jesse would be safe with them until he returned. But it still crushed him inside as he put distance between him and his precious boy.

Herobrine shot out of the dark, sword already swinging.

Steve summoned his blade, barely able to block in time as Herobrine met him head on. Steve flipped back, landing roughly on a fallen tree. He leapt off it, landing again in a clearing as Herobrine followed after him.

"No little beastie?" Herobrine chuckled, "Left them in the woods to die eh?"

"My child will not be harmed by you, not now not ever." Steve snarled, "Already well out of your reach."

"No matter…" Herobrine scraped his sword along the mud, "I will eventually find them, but until then your little one will suffer because Daddy, never came home." He swung.

Steve blocked, parrying around his brother and stabbing for the ribs, "Why should this matter to you!" he demanded. He flipped as Herobrine went for his legs, kicking up mud. "This has nothing to
do with you!"

"This has everything to do with me!" Herobrine sucked water from a nearby tree whipping it at Steve before the other could come in for a lunge, "That you dare pretend to be normal! That you dare disregard who you are! You are a god!"

"I am no god! And neither are you!" he ducked, feeling the sharpness of the water slice into his cheek.

"You have a sniveling little brat and pretend you are nothing! You cannot ignore who you are Steven! You cannot live a normal life and ignore me!"

"You never had a say!"

"I can handle Alex, but your child." Herobrine landed onto a fallen tree, "Your child is your everything. And nothing, nothing in this world or any of Notch's damned worlds will stop me from taking everything from you."

Thunder rumbled above and lightning flashed.

Steve's blood boiled, "You will never harm-" he parried a blow, snapping Herobrine's diamond blade.

"I will! And I assure you it will be in the most agonizing way possible!" Herobrine roared, twisted around Steve's follow up attack.

Herobrine's boot came into contact with Steve's chest, knocking him across the clearing. Steve slammed into the mud, rolling from the impact, his sword knocked clean from his hands. He got up onto his hands and knees, looked desperately for the blue blade in the muddy terrain.

"Wonder how long it will before your child figures you are never coming home!" Herobrine sneered, racing forward with his broken weapon.

Steve slid away, his backside coming to a stop against a boulder.

No!

Herobrine was grinning, "You've lost Steven!"

Looking past his brother, he snapped, "No! You have!" He dodged the blade, it barely missed his throat. He set both his feet against Herobrine's chest, and shoved hard. The force sent his brother flying right in to the branches of a fallen tree.

The first large branch tore out of Herobrine's chest and he stiffened. A startled pained sound escaping his lips. He reached up, gripping the branch, as blood dripped out and bone cracked. "Well played…" he rasped out.

Steve slumped down the boulder, chest heaving, "You….won't get to my…child…." He panted.

Herobrine grinned, blood staining his teeth, "Neither will you."

A pain blossomed in the middle Steve's stomach, and he looked down to see the hilt of Herobrine's blade. The other had thrown his sword at Steve when he had shoved him away. Steve slowly pulled out the blade, feeling the broken jagged weapon sliding through. He shakily removed it, the sword hitting the mud. But the damage had been done. He could feel it; his liver had been punctured, the
poisons seeping into his body.

A fatal wound.

*I'm sorry Jesse I-

Herobrine laughed, "And by the- erg- time you get back…" he laughed. "I'll already be here."

"You can't touch-" Steve coughed, "You can't touch my-my…" he cringed. "Alex and I have-

enchantments in place. You'll never, not matter- no matter what form you take- you will never be

able to touch our child."

Herobrine sneered, "Then…..neither will you."

"I- I won't stop till I get my…"

"Think about it Steve," the other said, "Do really….do you really want them looking over their

should their whole life? Do you want your precious little one to live in fear for as long as they live?

They'll- they'll die by me or they'll die fearing me- me either way…I will win." He laughed.

Steve stiffened.

Herobrine kept laughing, kept laughing as he took his last breath in this world, "I…will…

never….stop. And without…your gift…” he trailed off, eyes slipping closed.

Steve let his head fall back, looking up at the pouring sky, droplets splashing thick and hard on his

face. He clutched his wound, tears slipping out of his eyes.

Gift?

His heart seizes.

The amulet!

Jesse doesn't have his amulet!

Steve lets out a broken wail as death takes its claim.

Steve's eyes shot open and he immediately leapt out of the clean cotton bed, "NO!"

Notch was on his feet in an instant, "Steve wait!"

"No! I have to get back! I have to get to Jesse!" Steve looked frantically around the one room cabin,

"Where is the damn door."

"Steve you need to-"

He whipped around to face his father, "Why didn't you warn me? Why didn't you say anything?!!"

"I tried to get a hold of you!"

"Jesse is alone and I need to get to him! And-Where is the damn door!"

He finally found it, *both* of them. Steve froze. "No…"

"Steve if you'd just let me-
"Is he there?"

"What?"

"Is. Jesse. There?! Is that what you were trying to tell me?!"

"No! Heaven's no!" Notch flinched, "I'm trying to tell if you need me-

"Need you?!

Steve raged, "You weren't there when Herobrine did what he did! You haven't been there since, what makes you think I can expect you to do anything for Jesse?!!"

"Steve just wait you have to know. Herobrine-

The door slammed shut behind him and Steve awoke inside of his home in the First World.

"Alex!"

He heard the bang of the front door, and heavy footsteps up the stairs. He climbed out of the bed just as the bedroom door burst open.

Alex looked at him, winded, hair in disarray, eyes clouded with fear. She looked at him, tears pooling in the green orbs, "Steve! Oh, nonono!" she whipped back around, running down the stairs.

"Alex!"

"I was giving you some time, if you didn't come here then you made it- I- I should have just gone!"

She stopped at the bottom turning around and grabbing his arms, "Is our baby safe? Steve please tell me he didn't-"

"I got Herobrine, Jesse is safe."

"We have to go, we have to get back!"

A thought was tugging on the back of his mind a lingering whisper. Steve looked over shoulder, even though he knew the crossroads door was no longer behind him. His father had said Herobrine… "Alex I think-"

She was already going out the door. "Steve hurry!"

"Alex wait! Jesse doesn't have his amulet!"

But his wife was gone, already trekking a grueling pace towards the portal gate. Not even slowing down as she entered the village ruins. "We have to beat him to the hallway then! We'll follow the maps!"

Steve ran up behind her as she got to the door, "Alex! he gasped out.

"We don't have time to talk! We have to get back!" Alex jumped through the portal

Steve followed through, gasping as he entered the hallway. The signs, their maps. It was all gone. Every marker and label on every door in the portal hall had been destroyed.

Alex stood just a few feet away ahead of him, frozen in place. "No..No…..no….”

Steve joined her and looked at the one solitary sign remaining on the floor.
Which door? Which door? Can you even recall?

-Herobrine.

Steve freezes, his heart clenching. Because the sign is right. Thousands of years of memories, crammed into his mind and he can't remember which door is theirs. Which door is Jesse's and without the amulet they'll-

"No…." Alex brings shaking hands to her mouth, shaking her head. Because she's thinking the same thing. "No. No. No!" her skin cracks around her wrists, and her shaking amplifies. "No! No! JESSE!"

She collapses to the ground in a wail, a wave of power bursting forth from her as she succumbs to her grief. The energy that spreads out is hard and strong, some of the frames on nearby portal doors crack, killing their magic and making them go dark. Pillars snap and topple, shattering as they hit the ground.

Steve is buffeted back slightly by the force, the First World door groaning in protest behind him, but it holds. He realizes as he looks at the ruined hallway, that….

Notch had been trying to warn him.

"My baby…my baby…" Alex sobs. She remains on the floor of the desecrated hall, rocking back and forth on her knees as she cries into her hands, "Jesse my baby!"

Steve drops down pulling her in, trying to contain his own emotions as his wife relapses back and forth into her deity state. "We'll find him Alex."

Alex clings onto him, wailing, chest heaving.

"We will get him back."

"We looked for days, weeks, months." Steve said stiffly. "But there were twice as many doors, and neither of us had been there since your birth. Herobrine destroyed everything. And without your amulet we…we couldn't…"

Jesse was silent, watching as Steve struggled to keep going.

"By the time we thought we were getting close, he was back too." Steve continued, "He'd attack and if we lost he'd tear down all the markers and labels again. It just kept going. We tried everything, even the Immortal's gate and…. I couldn't get what he said out of my head. About you, looking over your shoulder your whole life." Steve took a shuddering breath, "We…/…..we discovered….we couldn't protect you. We couldn't see you die. A chance of you having a life without us was better than living in fear from someone who was after you since birth. We didn't want to see you die Jesse and…..We went back here, to the First World…and we never left. We failed you."

Jesse swallowed, looking down at the snow as he trekked, "You never left?"

"Only once, over a year ago. I had this feeling, this call. You were in danger…." The adult took a deep breath. "I went through the Immortal's Gate, I just let it take me where ever. And I ended up in this world, and there was this thing. It devoured everything and I…"

Steve didn't answer, "It had taken so much of the world, and I thought…this was where he was. Now he is gone."

Jesse said nothing.

Steve suddenly stopped talking and walking as well. Jesse looked forward and was surprised to see the cabin. The place where he had been at the beginning of this wild adventure.

"Wait, is this your house?"

"Yes," Steve said, voice barely hearable.

"I thought you had a house in the village. Lukas thought it was the one with all the fancy jewels in the walls?"

"I did on occasion, it was hard though. It was more of a temple than a house. Try sleeping when there is a statue of you downstairs." Steve opened the door of the cabin, "No, this was my first home, my first house. Everything very dear to me, everything important, I keep here."

Jesse entered the cabin once again, the air inside as brisk as the outside.

This was Steve's cabin, he realized. Suddenly the quaintness of the building had whole new feel to it.

Thousands of years ago, a single human alone in a vast empty world; had built his home here.

The thought of being in the first house ever created was overwhelming.

Steve kneeled down and picked up a book from the floor. The journal Jesse had dropped what seemed like an eternity ago. "That's your journal?"

"One of them anyway," The adult flipped through the book a moment. "I keep diaries and write down every day of my life, so I can remember. But sometimes, I take important things, and I put them in separate logs. When Alex and I were searching for a place to raise you; I would document the ones we found fitting. It doesn't have exact locations, but it will help you find a general area for you to begin your search." He stops thumbing the book, "This is the one, I'll translate it when we get back."

"That will help," Jesse says, "Thanks."

"Had I known you were….I wish I had thought of this…” Steve cringes and shoves the journal into his pack.

"It's not your fault-"

"Jesse, we wanted so badly to have you with us," Steve says, "We thought what we did what was best. We thought staying away was the only way to keep you safe, because we couldn't protect you last time, because-" he flinches, "And you still almost died. And- and-"

"I know."

"We didn't want to leave you…” Steve says quietly. It's something he's been saying for years, Jesse could tell. It was a mantra to remind the Immortal of his biggest failure.

Herobrine had been wrong.

Jesse wasn't their biggest regret.
Losing him was.

Jesse ponders on this a moment, he shoves his hands into his pockets. Then heart pounding, he moves closer to the broken man. "You know….It's kinda funny actually," he says after taking a second to gather his courage.

Steve looks at him, confused.

Jesse himself looks out the window, watching the snow lightly fall. "Axel, Olivia and I used to have this game when we were kids. We would go out looking at all the adults and try to pick who we liked best to be our parents. You know, wishful child thinking. But being here, I couldn't help but think about that all over again. Like how cool would it be, if Steve and Alex could have been my parents?" Jesse laughed, choking slightly on emotions, "And look at that, we were related!"

Steve stared.

"Look, what I mean to say is" Jesse continued, turning back to Steve, "I know you tried. I understand that you didn't want me looking over my shoulder for the rest of my life. I get it, you wanted me safe."

"Jesse-"

"Just….let me finish?" Jesse let out a deep breath, "I know…it's going to take awhile. Accepting something as big as this is never easy. But I want you to know, that I….I want to make this work. I want you to be my parents still."

Steve's eyes widen a little.

Jesse swallowed, throat thick, "So what do you say….Dad? Do you want to try? Because- cause I really do."

Steve said nothing at first. Jesse fought back tears at the slim prospect that Steve hadn't meant a word and didn't want him at all. But then suddenly Steve looked away, taking a shuddering breath. Then there was a choked cry, and tears were sliding down his cheeks. "If…If that's what you – if that would make you happy."

He almost cried in relief, "I was afraid you were going to say no, you took so long."

Steve looked back at him, eyes sparkling though tears. "I would never….ever not want you."

"I'm just so bad at speeches, I-"

"Genetic thing, my old man wasn't very good at them either."

Jesse smiled, "He really doesn't like it when you call him that."

Steve choked on a laugh, "Talked to him then?"

"Yeah, we played Uno," he answered.

"Sound so much like him."

Jesse shifted, "Are we….are you okay?"

"I'll be better when we tell Alex." Steve smiled softly, reaching out and running a hand along Jesse's cheek. "Jesse…" he mumbles, "My Jesse…."
Jesse let out a cry then, and Steve pulled him in, hugging him tight. "You came out better than I ever could have done," his father whispered.

Jesse bumped foreheads with the other, "You would have done a good job."

"You're sweet. Delusional – like me- but sweet."

Jesse laughed, clinging tighter to the person he had come to care greatly for. Steve was his father; and all those years missed didn't matter. He was here now, and that was a wonderful feeling.

"We should get back," Steve whispered, "Ale-

"You're Mom is going to be getting lunch ready by now. And we have till dinner to get back. We don't want your friends to be worried."

"Heaven forbid if I scare them again."

The pair laughed, leaving the cabin behind. The air now slightly warmer that it had been before.

It was going to be okay.

Alex caught them both as they returned by dark. She smiled at Steve, hesitating slightly as he and Jesse approached together. "Did you have a good trip?" she asked softly.

"More than you know hun," Steve rubbed Jesse's arm, "More than you know."

She looked between the pair.

"We…I want to….."Jesse smiled, "I was hoping...M-

Alex's mouth parted slightly, a small gasp escaping her lips, tears pooled in her eyes.

"I - I want us to be a family. I hope-

Alex hurried to him and hugged him tight, sobbing into his ear. "Oh Jesse, I'm so sorry!"

"I know you tried," Jesse whispered.
She squeezed tighter, "I'm going to always be here, I will never-"

"I know." Jesse assured.

Steve joined the hug, and for a moment, they were all one, a broken family mended together in a hug. A warmth and love so strong that the air around them no longer held its chilly bite.

"Ivor that is not how you cook- gah!"

Alex pulled away, rubbing the tears out of her eyes, "Oh, trouble in the kitchen." She laughed, lip quivering slightly, "Duty calls."

"Yeah, you don't want Ivor burning your house down."

Alex smiled, kissing his nose, and departed for the house Steve following after. Jesse got up the steps just as Ivor stepped out of the kitchen, smiling sheepishly as Alex and Steve walked by.

He looked at Jesse, "Aiden has no respect whatsoever."

Jesse smirked.

Ivor settled against the house, "We're glad you are back, Lukas was beginning to worry," Ivor coughed.

"Doesn't he always?" Jesse laughed softly.

"True." Ivor placed a hand on Jesse's shoulder, "Are you alright?"

"Yeah, um, Dad and I just….needed to clear some things up."

The elder raised an eyebrow. "Ah, so you have decided to accept them as your parents then?"

"Yeah, I do."

Ivor glanced into the house, "I suppose this means you finally found your family then, you are complete."

Complete?

Notch's words echoed in his mind.

"You have had love and family in a one of a kind form that many do not see."

Jesse looked into the house, seeing everyone prepping for dinner. Lukas was trying to fold the napkins all while trying to jab Aiden with a fork who in turn was armed with a spoon. Steve and Petra were laughing, hardly bothered by Alex's half hearted scolding as they 'snuck' early tidbits.

He thinks about the people who he can't see, the ones who had always been there for him. Olivia would be here, fussing over making everything perfect. Axel would be eating already. And Reuben...well...He wonders what it would look like, with both halves of his life brought together.

Complete thought?

"You are in the unique position to define what your family is."

"No," Jesse says.
Ivor looks surprised.

"I've always had it," Jesse stares at the scene before him, smiling. "My family isn't complete, it's just gotten a little bigger."

Chapter End Notes

Art Belongs to LunaDestiny
"Now be careful," Alex said pulling out of her hug with Lukas, "You know where to find us. If you can't make it to Ground Town, you can always come here."

"Thanks, we'll be careful," Lukas said.

"Are you sure you feel well enough?" Steve asked, hand resting on Jesse's shoulder.

"Dad, I'll be fine," Jesse gave his hand a squeeze, "I know how to get a hold of you if something goes wrong."

Steve's hand drifted down to the sparkling blue amulet on Jesse's neck. A carefully made gift that was created long ago; the third matching piece of Alex and Steve's own amulets was finally where it belonged.

"I guess you do…Remember, rub it clockwise three times, and we'll be there. It can't be removed unless you allow it to."

"I know," Jesse assured, "I'll check in often. When we get home I want you guys to meet Axel and Olivia."

"That sounds like a great plan. We can't wait." His father said with a smile.

"Thanks so much for your guys' help," Petra said shaking Steve's hand, "Sorry Ivor pestered you so much with questions."

"It's fine," he replied, "I didn't mind. He can ask all he wants."

"Careful," Jesse whispered, "You'll regret saying that."

"I heard that!" Ivor cut in.

Laughter erupted, echoing off the snow covered walls of the portal temple.

"Are you guys going to be okay?" Jesse asked.

"We'll be done healing soon," Alex said, "But until then, we'll stay on the down low."

Jesse turned to Aiden, smiling, "You sure you don't want to come with us?"

The other paused from tightening his coat straps, he snorted, but he was smirking. "I'm good, too much of a health hazard." He jabbed his head towards the portal, "Besides, with Ground Town recovering from the wall collapse, they're going to need help getting through the winter. You know, someone with more "down to earth" experience."

"By yourself?"

"Naw, Milo, Isa and Reg are helping. And I have Gill and Maya." Aiden glanced at Steve, "You're dad said he would come down and keep an eye on things too."
"I can fix what Herobrine destroyed," Steve said.

"I'll be taking care of our village," Alex said, "And Steve will remain there till the wall is fixed."

"That's really cool," Jesse said surprised.

"Hell yeah! The First – not that any of the locals need to know that bit- would be awesome to have around for some help." Aiden grinned.

"Speaking of need to know," Lukas patted the pocket where his journal lay, "Aiden and I decided to leave this little trip exclusively in our notebooks." He smiled at Jesse, "Even if you weren't famous enough already, having knowledge like this public…well…probably isn't a good thing."

"It's for the best," Alex agreed. She took a deep breath, "Now hurry along, while you have time in the day, and before I start crying."

"Adventure!" Ivor yelled, racing into the portal.

"Hey! Old man slow down!" Aiden cursed, looking at Jesse with a groan, "Here we go again." He said as he rushed after.

Lukas and Petra laughed then waved at Steve and Alex.

"Bye!" Petra called, "You guys are awesome!" then she to leapt into the magical gate.

"Yeah! Thanks for the bow!" Lukas added, before vanishing as well.

"Take care!" Alex called. Her and Steve briefly waving before they turned to Jesse.

"Well, good luck kiddo." Steve said, "Miss you already."

"I hate to let you go, but…"Alex kissed him on the forehead, "You'll find your home and friends soon."

"I will," Jesse said, "Hugging them both, "I miss you both already. But I can't wait for you to meet them,"

They hugged tight, "I'm sure we'll love them." Alex whispered.

Jesse lingered there for a moment, relishing in the hug.

"Remember, your friends are there for you just as much as you are there for them." Steve whispered in his ear, "I have no doubt that together there is nothing you can't do."

"Okay," Jesse whispered back. He gave his parents one last squeeze, and reluctantly pulled away.

Taking a quick second, he glanced at the world around him. The wonder and awe was now restored. Then he looked at his parents, smiling proudly and holding each other close.

Yeah, he couldn't wait for Olivia and Axel to meet them.

"See you guys soon!" Jesse called, he raced towards the portal, pausing, " Bet you I'll be home before winter is up!"

"We'll take that bet!" they replied.
Then with renewed mind and soul, Jesse leapt through the magical gate; onto the next adventure.

Onward to home.

"Hey guys wait for me!"

"Jesse?"

Jesse peeked open an eye, rolling over on the uncomfortable bunk, "Lukas?"

The blonde peeked over the side of the wood, "I'm sorry were you asleep?"

"No not really," Jesse sat up, "These bunks are a pain in the back. You okay?"

"I couldn't sleep," Lukas whispered, "I'm a little stressed to be honest. I'm worried about Olivia and Axel."

Jesse cringed as Lukas hopped up and sat down next to him, "Yeah, I am too."

"Are you sure about this plan? None of the other players seemed really motivated after your speech."

"I am painfully aware my speeches aren't the best, but it is a genetic thing."

"I didn't mean it that way." Lukas sighed, "It's just….Hadrian is bound to try something tomorrow. We…do you think we need help?"

Jesse paused, noticing he was twisting his amulet between his fingers.

"We could call them. I'd like to see Hadrian stand up against two immortals."

Jesse stared at the amulet, quietly, mulling it over, "We go through with the plan."

Lukas raised an eyebrow, "Are you sure?"

"I have you guys to rely on. We can do this, together. I know what matters now, and with you guys beside me, we can beat Hadrian and Mevia."

"If you think so."

"I know so."

Lukas gives him a soft smile.

Jesse smiles brightly back, "We have a plan. It'll be okay. But I will call them if the plan goes to pot, I swear."

Lukas scoffed, "Why do I feel it will anyway?"

"Cause it always does," Jesse laughs.

Some Time Later…..

A butterfly landed on Jesse's nose. He let it sit there a moment, till urging it away with a gust of breath.
"It's so pretty here." Olivia said.

"Name is kind a tacky though," Axel stated.

"Axel~"

"What? It is…"

Springtime was blossoming in Ground Town. Daisies sprung up everywhere, birds flocked in from the south. Zombies were able to remove their frozen feet from the rivers and lakes.

Good ole springtime.

"Oh hey! There is Aiden!" Olivia waved, "Hi Aiden!" she called.

Perched on the city's defensive wall chatting with Reginald; the addressed male looked over at the sound of his name. He paused momentarily before returning the wave, even smiling.

Olivia lowered her arm, "I can't believe you two are friends now."

Jesse just smiled, arms crossed behind his head as the trio walked.

"Yeah it is kind weird," Axel said, "Considering he wasn't last year. I remember when he was kind of a jerk to us, like….all the time."

"Well, sometimes people can change." Jesse said, "Aiden and I had quite a few building experiences - OW! OW! Fortis!"

Axel and Olivia backed away laughing as the stone goliath patted Jesse lovingly on the head.

"Dude that is awesome!" Axel grinned.

"Yeah, well- Ow! Thanks buddy- Ouch! Thank you Fortis!"

Fortis ceased his pats and with a low grunt and a tilt of his head the golem walked away.

"Was that the golem you made?" Olivia asked, still giggling.

"Yeah, how'd you guess?" Jesse said, rubbing his head.

Olivia laughed.

The trio continued their walk, Jesse pointing out the highlights of the town along the way.

"Um, Jesse?" Olivia suddenly piped up.

"Yeah?"

"I've got a question."

"Shoot."

Olivia stopped walking, coming to rest on a park bench; Axel joined her. "While I was reading Lukas's book of your adventures, I noticed something odd."

Jesse tilted his head, "What?"
"Well Lukas logged it pretty well, but there was this huge gap between your guys adventure with the White Pumpkin and your battle with PAMA."

"Yeah, did nothing cool happen or something?" Axel added.

"Ah," Jesse said, "Well that's why I asked you guys here today, I wanted to cover that gap-"

"Knew it!"

"What?"

"Come on man," Axel frowned, "You've been acting kind of odd these past few weeks since you got home. You're hiding something, don't think we haven't noticed that necklace you are never without nowadays."

Jesse stopped, not realizing he had been twisting his amulet between his fingers. "That is….part of what I need to show you." He rubbed the stone clockwise.

"Jesse…"

"Guys I'm serious. I am going to tell you what happened, during the gap. It's just…complicated? I'd rather just show you."

Axel's eyes narrowed, then they widened, and he snapped his fingers, "I got it Olivia! Jesse's got himself a date!"

Jesse turned scarlet as Olivia laughed, "WHAT?!"

"It's nothing to be secretive about man; Olivia and I are cool with it."

"Wha- No that's not-"

"Jesse's got a girlfriend~"

Jesse scoffed, "No," he paused. "But I might have eloped," he mumbled.

Olivia's eyebrow's shot up, "You what?"

A sharp whistle cut through the air, and the group looked to see Aiden waving from the wall. He pointed just past Jesse's shoulder. Jesse turned in time to see Ground Town's portal flash.

Jesse smiled

"I'm ready for you to meet Axel and Olivia, meet me at Ground Town?"

"Rub the stone kiddo and we'll be there."

"Come on guys," Jesse said.

"Jesse hold up, I thought you were going to fill us in," Olivia countered.

"I am, but you guys need to meet some people first."

Axel looked ahead, "Who? Them?" he asked pointing.

"Yeah," Jesse answered.
"Who are they?" Olivia inquired.

Jesse hummed slightly, a eager smile tugging at his lips, "Do you remember that game we used to play when we were little?"

She was confused to have the topic switch so suddenly, but the female obliged. "The parent game? Yeah, what about it?"

"Well, it's kind of a funny story, and again, super complicated." Jesse laughs. He grabs Olivia and Axel by the hands heading down to the portal path. Steve and Alex spot him, and they smile brightly at the sight of him. His dad wraps an arm around his mom's waist, and they both eagerly wave.

"Olivia, Axel, meet Steve and Alex." Jesse says as the trio came to the couple.

They exchanged handshakes.

"Nice to meet you," Olivia says politely.

"Like-wise," says Steve.

"Alex and Steve are part of the adventure I am about to tell you guys about," Jesse explains, "A really big part of it actually."

Olivia and Axel both look in curiosity, and his parents smile knowingly.

Jesse takes a deep breath. Two halves of his life stands before him, and he's ready for them to become one.

"It starts with a chilly autumn night here in town…"

\textit{The End.}
Chapter End Notes

Art by LunaDestiny

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!