



## Chapter 1

### Graduation Day

When Anuk, an Assisi Human announced that she would be celebrating her scholastic graduation with a reading from the Book of Words, there was much anticipation and excitement on her home island, Roesse Island.

Anuk was very bookish, unique, and had been the subject of curiosity on the Island for several seasons, ever since she first appeared on the Island as a stranger who had just returned home. The stories she had brought back from her incredible journey had now become legendary poems, and studied, inasmuch as the school teachers changed the curriculum so that the school libraries were lavished with new poems; and if that was not enough wonder, there was also an exquisite gold Elephant Being tattoo between her shoulder blades to behold. With each passing season, the gold Elephant Being gradually, magically emanated through her skin. Anuk barely felt it; the tattoo just appeared, and it grew more beautiful each season. Now twenty-three, Anuk was not the same sixteen year old girl with copper roses and black stem tattoos on the inside of her forearms, forced to leave the only home she had ever known, and who could cook up a storm with just about anything. At twenty-three, the Islanders began to call her the “Island Chef”; but “culinary explorer” would have been nearer the mark. Some whispered about the new tattoo, believing it held the secret to another quest; it did seem fitting that she should birth such an emblem and possess the Book of Words.

“It will have to be deciphered.” they said. “It isn’t forgiving, and adversity will come of it!”

But so far adversity had not presented itself; and as Anuk was generous with her time and Books of Poems, most Beings were willing to devour her bookish quirks and yummy yamagoos biscuits. She remained a guest in island dwellings, as she had many devoted students among the Islanders who welcomed her in their dwellings for reading poems. Doors opened, welcoming Anuk everywhere she went.

The most intriguing of these doors, and where Anuk was most treasured, were Poach dwellings. When Anuk was eighteen, she forged an unforeseen friendship with refugee Poach, and brought them to live at Roes Island, crushing fears that any amicable relationship would never be possible with the brutal slayers of Animal Beings. These disbelievers included Human and Assisi Beings who defied the Empire of Gibo, and squashed it forever. This marked the beginning of a wondrous peace. Anuk and the Poach Refugees happened to have the same belief, that all Beings were equal and none had dominion over another. “You had better come live at Roes Island.” said Anuk on the day she met secretly with Ariel, the son of the Empress Hayyel and the peace-minded Poach Refugees known as the Custos. The Custos were a secret group of Poach Beings and Human Beings from Gibo. They were guardians of the Orb and all Beings, who long ago lost their most precious possession, their soul, as well as of the Empire. In their attempt to atone for their misdeeds, the Custos joined forces with Anuk and all Beings to rebuild relations between the Empire and all Beings.

One hundred seasons had passed when Anuk reached her twenty-third birthday and graduation. Each season, the Assisi Humans celebrated the coexistence amongst different Beings on Roes Island; but now, the excitement in the air intensified as something magical, the Book of Words was about to be read on graduation day, and as such, it signaled a celebration in welcoming a new season.

In a very special departure from tradition, Anuk, chosen as one of the new scholars, was in a rather unusual position for such a young Assisi, and a great honour for an Assisi. Anuk desired to emulate the great Helithian, ancient philosopher Babirusa, the legendary teacher to the Helithian nation. Throughout her life and up to the last moment before her execution, she professed that ‘a life unexamined was not a life worth living.’ She cultivated a courageous nation of idealistic thinkers with the ability to choose a happier and more peaceful existence. The Helithians understood, they were to be part of this world. The coexistence with the Beings was the Helithians greatest victory.

Anuk had first read about Babirusa in the Book of Poems that was given to her on her sixteenth birthday. Now, at age twenty-three, this was an important reminder: the age at which Babirusa had led Helithians to an awareness of their own ignorance by opening the doors to the discovery of their truth. Her non-violent use of logic and reason in her defense eventually gave her opponents the opportunity to bring her to trial, where they sentenced her to death. “Would this be my fate?” wondered Anuk.

Feet tapped with joy on Roes Island and the surrounding Dragons Islands as word of the coming reading travelled deep into the sea and in every direction from the Islands. The true story of Anuk’s incredible journey became an adventure to be told over

and over again; the old Beings found this bedtime story inspiring for their children, who were encouraged to dream bigger and bigger dreams.

No one had a more attentive audience than Ester, the musical Vor. The Vors were one of the three Poach Refugee races that had taken refuge on Roes Island.

The creation of an alliance between the Rockens, the Travs and the Vors threatened the peace the Helithians had come to know for thousands of years. They named this allegiance Poach - the Orb Salvator race. The Vors autocratic ministries reigned throughout the Orb, governing offenses and appointing penalties in the name of righteousness. Through questioning, critical discussion, rational argument and systematic presentation, the Helithian women conquered the Poach, but not without trials and tribulations.

Ester's Vor large bulky fingers were surprisingly graceful as they strummed the cords of her Voritian harp as gently as stroking the wings of a Butterfly Being. Standing solidly in her anchored and tree-like Vor bearing, she sang Anuk's story in a most angelic voice.

Ester had settled comfortably on Roes Island and made many friends; the true Ester was living with music in her heart. All three Salvator races, who now prefer to be addressed as the Custos, were on very friendly terms with Anuk and all the Islanders, including the Horse Beings and the Dragon Beings. The three Custos lived amongst the villagers, the Horse Beings and Dragon Beings who had once been their prisoners in Gibo.

"A very inquisitive Assisi is Anuk, as I've observed from the first day I saw her in Gibo." thought Ester. So true, for Anuk was very involved with Ester's music and her instruments, calling her 'Glorious Harpist', and consulting her constantly on the playing of the Voritian harp, Ester was recognized as the leading harp authority by all on the Islands, apparently even in Gibo.

"But what about this new grown-up Anuk that lives in her late grandmother's Amid and mother Stella tree dwelling?" thought Ester. "Anuk an Assisi Human who has grown to love the Voritian harp as much as the culinary arts, but she's more than all of this, the Custos say. It's curious why an Assisi of Roes Island should want to know how to read the Book of Words, when a Poem is the heart of all souls."

"And no wonder they are the heart of all souls." thought Ester, "they are a piece of writing that partakes of the nature of both speech and song that is nearly always rhythmical, and created with words chosen for their sound and suggestive power as well as their sense. The Book of Words – can it do justice to the senses, to the soul?"

"You're talking to yourself again Ester." said Sophie the studious Trav. "The Anuk ancestors and living relatives have all been great poets; and they are a studious bunch, clearly. They spend their days rummaging through the scrolls in the library in that sizable ancestral Salix tree, and that is where you can expect to find them. It is no wonder that the Empire wants their head on a spike. But be that as it may, Anuk is a clever and as courageous an Assisi as you could ever wish to meet. Very much like her mother and grandmother, and the great philosopher Babirusa. After all Anuk's lineage was also Horse Being, that's what makes her an Assisi – part Human Being and part Horse Being; and likewise for the Empress Hayyel's family, even more the reason why she wants Anuk and all Assisi's head on a spike.

“What, how do you mean? Are you saying the Empress hails from the lineage of Horse Beings?” asked Estel.

“Yap, adding insult to injury of the Assisi lineage.” smiled Sophie.

“Many many, many seasons ago the Assisi Humans from Nenn, grandmother Amid’s birth partem and Helithia, grandfather Robin Jeen’s birth partem, left their homes and dispersed to different partems of the Orb to protect the Animal Beings from the Poach, yes...us!” pointed Sophie seated on the rock next to the tea pot on the orange wooden table. Her mammoth hands gripped the elegantly carved teapot. She lowered the teapot and raised the teapot and repeating this motion until pouring the teacup three quarters full.

“They defeated many of the Poach, but not all as we clearly know, but managed to save many Animal Beings from our grips and the Empire, but not all. It was not long before the battles ended the Empire ordered the hunt all Assisi Humans. The order was kill or captured them for the research facility. It was not long after the order that many Assisi Humans were captured, including Anuk’s mother and father.” Sophie sipped her tea loudly and looked up at Ester.

“We have much to atone for.” said Ester.

Sophie poured them a second cup of tea and reached for the famous Anuk special yamagoos biscuits on the plate at the far end of the table. “It’s no wonder Hayyel is the way she is. Her father killed her youngest sister Molali.” Sophie sipped her tea even louder.

“I heard rumors of this story, but...” Ester sat next to Sophie.

“Ya...But it is for sure! But even with the Emperor’s powerful presence Molali, did not doubt her own true self, she did not deny her own convictions and sever her allegiance with the Assisi and other Beings.” said Sophie as her big white teeth bit into a yamagoos berry deep in the biscuit. “In her last hours, Molali sacrificed her life for the greater good of Human Beings and their most precious possession, their soul. She managed to escape Gibo alone, and rescued Anuk just as her parents were being taken away, never to be seen again. And we both know where they were taken.”

“The research facility! Oh my! That poor child! How could she have found the courage to forgive us for what we did? There is no doubt...”

“That’s right, there is no doubt that she saw them submerged in the holding tanks in the research facility on that day she rescued the Animal Beings from Gibo!” said Sophie.

“But she would not have known which Assisi were her parents. She could only have believed they were amongst them.” Ester’s eyes filled with tears.

“I’ll continue with our history.” said Sophie with her lips resting on the rim of her teacup. “When the Emperor learned his daughter had betrayed him, it was as if a Dragon scale had pierced his heart. He fell on his knees before Molali and then sent her away. She disappeared like a bird flying into the fog. As you know, the Assisi Humans hold to their values and begged the Emperor to save his own daughter’s life, but their cries fell onto deaf ears. It was then that the Star Dragons and Horses carried Molali back to the stars with them.”

Ester sat quietly, looking up at the trees and the suns setting behind the edge of the field.

“You see, Molali had been banished twice from her home. When she was born

with the markings of the Assisi, so they took her away. The Emperor refused to accept that he and his wife were descendants of the Assisi. That was the first time the Star Dragons and Horses sheltered Molali.” Sophie sipped more tea. “Do you want to hear more of this story Ester?”

“Yes.” said Ester as she wiped her tears.

“After her second birthday, Molali was taken to Amid, where she would be educated. Amid raised Molali as her own daughter until she reached the age of seven. When the Empress learned that Molali was still alive, she begged the Emperor to allow their daughter back home.

“The Empire had searched high and low for Roes Island, but their efforts were to no avail. Amid ensured Molali’s safe passage after she sent word of her existence. No one ever knew how the Empress discovered the existence of her daughter. The Emperor was even more furious that his daughter Molali had survived and been raised by an Assisi. However, the Empress begged and begged for the return of their daughter; and in a brief moment of compassion, he granted her this one request. When Molali returned to the Empire, Hayyel, the Empress and Emperor’s eldest daughter, had just given birth to Ariel.

“Molali remained with her family until she was seventeen, a point at which she was most courageous, when she saved Anuk and returned to the stars. The Empress died of a broken heart shortly after Molali returned to the stars. Then, the Emperor did as well.” said Sophie, as she adjusted her big butt on the rock.

“Hayyel, no wonder, she’s as cold as ice. She comes across as heartless, even for her son.” said Ester. “She must bear the same Assisi markings!”

“Yap!” said Sophie her eyebrows curled up to her hairline.

“She’s one angry...”

“You can say that again!” chuckled Sophie.

“Like I said, I had heard the stories but no one believed them to be true!” exclaimed Ester.

“Well, it’s all written down in the Books of Poems, hidden away in the Gibo library. I am surprise that the poems have not been destroyed. I managed to get my hands on them many seasons ago. Well, I came upon their existence by accident. That is a story for another day.

“Does Howard, our jovial Rocken, know this story?” asked Ester.

“Yes, he knows what I just told you, but he also had his suspicions. He saw how Ariel behaved with the Horse Beings.” replied Sophie. “Ah, speak of the funniest Rocken on the Orb, and yes that is quite a contradiction in terms!” laughed Sophie and Ester.

From behind the trees, the tall gangly Rocken form with florid complexion and chalky barbed hair towered above the tree line as he walked firmly towards Ester and Sophie.

“Welcome Howard, cup of tea?” asked Ester.

“Yes, thank you.” replied Howard with his usual ear-to-ear smile.

“I just shared with Ester the story of the Empire Assisi lineage.” said Sophie.

“Anuk never did a kinder deed than when she brought us here to live amongst the Beings on Roes Island.”

“However, I reckon that it was a nasty knock for the Empress and her servants. The Empire thought they were going to get Anuk, when they went on the hunt for her in

the forest. Then she comes back with Horses and Dragons and rescues every Animal Being from Gibo; and she goes on living as she does, wiser each day, and yet, she has ceased to take massive action to ensure the coexistence of all Beings. Now she is a graduate and takes this day to read from the Book of Words, for everyone to hear. The Empress has also yet to cease taking massive action to stop Anuk from achieving her goal. The Empress no doubt also desires possession of the Book of Words. But why?" Howard sipped his tea loudly.

"How would the Empress know about the Book of Words?" asked Ester.

"Stories have been told over and over about the Book of Words for many seasons. Some believe it is just a legend, that it does not really exist," replied Sophie. "But somehow, I'm not sure how, but the Empress and Ariel know it's real!"

"Then you know more than I can speak to," said Howard. "I know nothing about the Book of Words. Anuk is generous with all of her Books, the many scrolls and journals tuck away in the library in her dwelling, and there is no lack of reading material anywhere on this Island; but I know of no other Book of Words anywhere on this Island or the entire Orb. I saw Anuk when she came back to Gibo, when she rescued all the Animal Beings, when I was on patrol in the forest and on the beach. I had only recently come forward to the Custos, but they had me stationed at the forest and the beach, helping to keep the Poach from trampling the area and killing all of them while Anuk and the others made their escape. And, in the middle of it all, Anuk and the others ran and flew past me, unaware of my presence. I don't doubt that they were expecting me to have blended in so well with the trees that she ran in between them, amongst the big yellow cedars with trunks as wide as the sky; but there wasn't enough cause to send more Poach in the area. But my new Custos friends made sure of that as well. They had strategically dispersed the Poach throughout Gibo, and they listened to all of Anuk's plans. Anuk has met with many of the Custos, assuring them that no harm would come to them, and I hope no harm will come to those who are still at Gibo and who are roaming the Orb, pretending to be at the Empress' service."

"Horses and Dragons and Ariel!" I said to Anuk. "Cakes and salads, and all manner of yummy dishes are what you should focus on. Do not interfere with the Empire's plans, or you will get yourself and those you love killed", I said to Anuk. And I might have said it to the Custos as well and many other Human Beings at one time or another." Howard added with a look of guilt and regret.

But Howard did not convince his audience or himself. It was an attempt at being the Empire's advocate he thought, to test them in order to ensure that he also was joining hands with those who knew for certain, they were part of the Change Makers. The word of Anuk's vision was now firmly fixed in the minds of the Beings determined to establish coexistence amongst all Beings and to save every Being most precious possession, their soul.

"They say that everyone is invited to the graduation celebration and the reading from the Book of Words, and there's going to be a surprise, tomorrow morning!" smiled Howard.

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That very night, three full moons circled the islands, and big bright bulbous orange moons shined downward, lighting up the dwellings and the forest. The winter of the three full moons celebrated the three hundredth wedding union of Grandmother Amid and Grandfather Robin. The season Anuk returned to Roese Island. The three full moons would remain high in the sky for three hundred more seasons until the summer of the merging of the moons for one enormous bulbous orange moon in the sky. And thus is the cycle of the Orb's moons. During the day, three brilliant orange suns warm the Orb.

That evening, pitter-patter of dancing feet and chimes of singing voices carried throughout the Islands. Islanders were excited to hear what were going to be Anuk's special dishes, of which many had not been eaten on the Islands since she had undertaken her studies.

The evening passed and the stars grew brighter. This and that was being prepared on Roese Island in order to receive guest from the surrounding Islands and the sea. An odd-looking apparatus dangling with chimes and laden with strings toted by Ester into the main village and up the hill, where the Mustangs come rumbling down into the village. Ester propped the apparatus on top of the hill overlooking down into the village on one side and down onto the beach on the other side. The Islanders peered at every step she made up the hill and cranked their necks upwards, staring at her until she had completed her mission. At the end of her task, Dragons flew overhead, through the moons' rays, from the direction of the Dragons Islands. One Dragon seemed to be leading the array of silver streaks in the sky. The Dragon flipped and turned, and performed all sorts of acrobatic movements while in flight. The Dragon was much larger than the other Dragons. The Islanders who were bound by their feet on the ground ran after the Dragons shouting cheers of joy through the village and up the hill and back down the hill. The Islanders with wings joined the Dragons in flight. All began to descend. At Anuk's dwelling, the largest of the Dragons landed: there were great cheers of joy running out of the dwelling.

That was Noga the Dragon, Anuk's best friend, whose fame on the Islands was due mainly to being an orphan Dragon. After the Poach attacked the Dragons of Big Rock partem, they killed many Dragons including Noga's parents and imprisoned the others at Gibo. Noga was the only remaining Dragon secretly tucked away at Big Rock. His parents had safely hid him away from the Poach. The Mermaid Being Mamira heard his cries. She cared for Noga until Anuk met Noga at Big Rock partem. Noga was only a child then of three years old, and he was unusually large for his age. He was the largest of the Dragons any Dragon had ever seen. Noga joined Anuk on her quest to Roese Island until they reached Brit partem. From there Anuk and her guardians continued their quest without Noga. Noga was too young. Being just a child, the Human Being clairvoyant Rose and Horse Being Shire on Brit partem raised Noga until it was time to reunite him with the Dragons of Dragon Island. It seemed to be graduation day for both of them. But rumour had it that his fame on the Islands was also due mainly to the education he had received from Rose and Shire. His schooling was far more difficult and stringent, but the Islanders knew nothing about it, not even Anuk or the other Dragons. To them, he was just one of them who had returned home with a great adventure to share and write many poems about; hence the Islanders' excitement. "Noga" they shouted, and the Big Dragon fanned his wings, bright and silver.

When Noga, accompanied by Anuk and some other Assisi, had finished greeting many of the Assisi living in the Salix forest, Anuk climbed up onto her friend's back like the good old days, and off they went for a spin in the air. They flew in and around the moons' rays, over the villages and the beaches.

At the far end of Roesse Island, Anuk and Noga were sitting on the beach with a ridge of rose bushes above the edge of the cliff. That evening was bright and peaceful. The rose scent drifted in the breeze. The waves trickled up over the sand, and the Glitter Sea Beings glowed in the water, all over the surf, and moved in unison towards the horizon.

"How beautiful are your Grandmother Amid's roses!" said Noga.

"Yes." said Anuk. "I am very fond indeed of every rose on this Island, and of all of Roesse Island and surrounding Islands; but I think something is coming our way again."

"You mean to take massive action?"

"I do. My passion and perseverance have not changed."

"Very well. It serves no purpose to think about it any longer or to talk about it for that matter. Stick to your plan, as usual, and change it when necessary, as usual, and it will turn out as it will...no doubt, as you know."

"I believe so. Anyway, I mean to make tomorrow a great day for all."

"I expect it will be." said Noga, looking up at the stars.

"But my heart feels funny." said Anuk. "Like I said, something is coming, it seems."

"Anuk, you know they, yes them, Aye your forever guardian, our oldest Horse Being Mtniel, and our oldest Dragon Being Kura see you as the avatar of change."

"Then if that is the case, Noga I need you by my side. I can't do this without you!" Of course you can't!" smiled Noga. Anuk heavy-hearted, looked up into his loving pitch black eyes.

Throughout the evening, more Beings from the sea and sky arrived on the Island, and still more Beings. There were cheers of greetings all around, and that very night, little sleep made for a long night of chitchat. The Nocturnal Beings had not seen so much excitement and animation on the Islands in a long time. But that evening, all manner of Beings began to pour out of every habitat for every kind of musical instruments, favourite dishes and decorations prepared for the celebration. Islanders became enthusiastic; and they began to watch the moons descent; and they watched eagerly for the three suns to rise, which was still a long ways away.

Before long Roesse Island and its beaches were flooded with Beings, and Roesse Island's inns and habitats reached over capacity, and extra food filled the island from all around. There was a constant stream of Beings up the hill, examining ever so cautiously the apparatus installed by Ester.

Ester appeared at the top of the hill. The visitors glared up at the Custos' considerable sundry appearance. The everyday Beings of Roesse Island also glared up at the Custos; they just could not help themselves. Their memories would flash back to the Poaches' old stories but quickly returned to the new stories. Ester was busy with writing music and songs and taught how to write music, how to write songs, and how to play Voritian musical instruments. Despite the instruments' enormous size, where most



Beings devised climbing apparatuses to play their favourite instruments, the students never missed a music lesson.

In the latter part of the evening, Islanders encountered the cast of characters spoken about in Anuk's story. A special reception area was designated in the main village, where plenty of food and juices delighted the special guests. Everyone stopped what they were doing and took a moment to shake the hands of Anuk's adoptive parents, the Fossa Beings, Julea and Lucca Fossa. Anuk's guardians and original crew accompanied the Fossas: Aye, scholar of the Lemur Beings, EagleOwl, philosopher of the Owl Beings, and philosopher as well as Kinkajou of the Potos Being, also known as the Honey-Bear. The Islanders already knew Aye, EagleOwl and Kinkajou quite well. The three remained on the Islands as Anuk's constant and dedicated guardians. They were there for her whenever she needed them.

Pikly, the long twiggy Phas Being from Phas partem would not have missed this grand day either. Tulip and several other fairies from Goldan partem accompanied Pikly on the Crystal Beings' vessel with a few Crystal Beings as well. The Crystal Beings transported the special guest to Roese Island. In one of the crystal vessels Lux, the Lucidum Being and friend to Rose and Shire joined them in Noga's return to the Dragon Islands.

Miel and her two grandsons Sal and Kar, who had survived their incarceration at the Gibo Horse Being prison Privare, galloped into the village to welcome the guests. Right behind them strolled the Dragons Jojo and her younger brother Juba. Their grandmother Kura remained in the Salix forest to rest.

A short while before the moons dipped into the sea and the suns sprung from the sea, the Islanders settled into each of their respective dwellings to rest a bit before the start of a new glorious day. The inns were bursting with visitors. It was a full house everywhere you looked. Even the beaches overflowed with Sea Beings of all sorts, resting on the shores of Roese Island.

Then the Bird Beings were up and chirping all over the Island. That was just as the suns ascended from the sea. Excitement was intense. Then it was morning, graduation day dawned. The suns warmed the faces, the sea air rushed through islands, voices hummed, and the celebration began.

Anuk and Noga met the guests on land and from the sea. Anuk gave away yamagoos biscuits to all the Beings. Anuk always made sure her famous yamagoos biscuits were available in abundance. She shared them with everyone anytime, no celebration was ever needed. They were the best biscuits anyone had ever tasted. Beings drooled just at the thought of them!

On this occasion, the yamagoos biscuits were a little bigger than usual. The children and guests were far from humble in accepting their biscuits. Their excitement failed all form of restraint. There were yamagoos berries the likes of which they had never seen before, all popping out of thick cocoa beans, and some were ready to be plucked and eaten raw. Roese Island gave up many of its berries for this celebration, yet many had come already stored in leafy pouches amongst the Fossas' belongings, all the way from Malagasy Island, the southern partem.

When the guests finished greeting one another, they were ready for the feast. There were songs, dances and music swinging from the top of the hill, followed by food

of all sorts prepared from the local harvest and brought in by the guests. Everyone ate here, and they were chitchatting with one another.

Various Avian Beings performed spectacular displays of acrobatic agility. Sea Beings sprung from the water in unison, singing along with Ester. Generous distribution of all manner of food and juices circulated endlessly as all eyes swung up and down from the sky to the sea. Every bit of the Island sparkled!

After the feast and the performances came the reading from the Book of Words. All the guests and locals were ready to hear Anuk read from the Book of Words. Their bellies were full and their feet danced until they could dance no more. They sat back and rested everywhere and anywhere they could find a place to drop their butts, perch or bob in the water. Some of the smaller Beings sat on the heads or shoulders of bigger Beings. Every Being was ready to listen to the reading from the Book of Words that had been written so many seasons ago.

“Hello Beings.” smiled Anuk, stepping onto the four-sided blue stone pillar large enough for Noga to stand next to her with his tail flat behind him.

“Hurray hurray! Happy graduation to Anuk and Noga!” shouted the crowd, and kept on repeating it in chorus with Ester strumming her musical instrument on the hill. Anuk signaled Noga to raise her to his shoulder. She sat on his shoulder. Her hands raised up high above to the sky, showing the Book of Words to everyone. The suns’ rays struck the gold Book; the golden cover shined its brightest reddish yellow glow. They could all see the Book glittering, radiating an aura all around.

“Beings!” she began again; “and a special welcome to all of our guests.”

“Anuk! Noga!” the crowd went wild! “Welcome Noga!” they shouted.

“I hope you are all enjoying yourselves today as much as I love being reunited with my friend Anuk!” said Noga, as his tail wagged left to right, creating a shocking breeze throughout the village.

Beings’ hands and feet gripped whatever they could to stop from falling over. For many, it was a first time they ever laid eyes on a Dragon Being. As some of the Beings were unaware and unprepared, the rush of air toppled some of them over, carrying them away a wee further back from where they originally stood or sat or dangled. Laughter sailed across the sea. Many of the visiting Beings were musically inclined. They bore the natural ability to vocalize weird and wonderful sounds, puff and huff, tip and tap their feet or hands, and flicker this and that, creating an orchestra. Indeed, the conductor at the top of the hill, Ester, raised her arms way up high and began directing the musical performance by motion of a baton made of a rose bush branch in her hand. The crowd went wild once again. They danced for a while longer.

The time had come to call the day to order to read from the Book of Words. With an opened mouth, Noga raised his head towards and gently released a red flame. The crowd settled back into their seats, branches and from every way, they had first settled.

“We all know why we are here today.” said Anuk. The Beings in the crowd rumbled and hummed amongst themselves. All eyes stared on the Book of Words cradled in Anuk’s arms. There was almost stillness in the air. Even the clouds drifting over the Island paused overhead against the bright blue sky.

“Before I say anything else, we must thank the Fairy Beings for this grand day. We would not be in possession of the Book of Words if it were not for their devotion to keeping it safe whilst under their care.” said Anuk.

Anuk turned to the Fairy Beings sitting on top of the Dragons’ heads. “We are forever grateful!”

“I was only sixteen when I first set eyes on this beautiful gold book.” said Anuk, raised the book up in front of her, and opened its cover. “I was captivated by the artistry of the beautiful silver leaves. Each leaf is inscribed in calligraphy. I recall looking down at the bizarre inscription along the outer margins of each leaf.” her finger ran up and down the leaf. “I remember seeing the words, understanding and being able to read each letter, but I could not comprehend the poem.” she pointed. “It was as though words were just dropped here and there. I believed there was an attempt to make sense of the words, yet there was not a hint of where to place each word.” she smiled at Kinkajou. “Kinkajou was as wise then as he is wise today. He advised us to return to the Book of Words when we could dedicate the time we needed to decipher its code.” she put the Book of Words in Noga’s hands.

“I do not know how to read from the Book of Words.” announced Anuk. The crowd went silent. Anuk looked over at Noga. “Noga will read from the Book of Words.” The crowd did not remain silent. The crowd hummed and whispered louder and louder. Anuk raised her hand. “Please, this is a great honour. I can understand your surprise. I was equally surprise. My friend here.” she pointed at Noga and smiled, “has received a grand education from Rose and Shire, who not only know how to read and write poetry, but they read and write prose as well. So you can imagine my surprise!” she smiled. “After this celebration I will begin my lessons on how to read and write prose from Noga. We will also have classes for everyone as well. Until I’ve mastered this skill, Noga will do us the honours.”

Noga lowered Anuk back down onto the pillar.

“Aye, I’m jumping out of my skin with excitement.” said Anuk. “I will finally learn to read from the Book of Words. I will be able to look at and comprehend the meaning of these written words by mentally interpreting the characters and symbols of which it is composed by someone other than a Poet.”

“Yes, that is exciting.” said Aye quietly.

“Aye, smile won’t you? I feel energized by this, as though a bolt of lightening fed me all of its energy!”

“Change Maker, remember Anuk the part you are to play in this world.”

“I know. I have had this feeling as if something is coming. I cannot quite explain it. But the Book of Words...”

Noga took a step forward. His big Dragon fingers opened the Book of Words to the first leaf. “This is my first time holding the Book of Words in my hands.” announced Noga. “I would like to share what I see on the leaf. As Anuk mentioned, the page is silver in colour, the words are black and written in calligraphy. Also, at the bottom right corner of each silver leaf is an illustration of a Gold Elephant Being.” he turned the inside of the Book of Words for everyone to see. You could have heard a tree leaf fall. The silence cracked through the air.

Anuk suspected the Book of Words had something to do with the Elephant Beings, but that is all she suspected. During her crossing to Roesse Island, she

encountered the spirits of the Elephant Beings now extinct from the Orb. She wondered why they would appear in the Book of Words.

Opened to the first page, Noga placed the Book of Words in the palm of his hand. His eyes rested on the words. He looked up at the crowd. His head turned right and down to Anuk. He glanced over at the other Dragons. He looked down at Rose and Shire.

Noga became reluctant to read the words out loud. His lips tapped open and closed. Air permeated his lungs with a bumpy exhale. The crowd was anxious. Not a Being blinked as they stared up at the Dragon.

“We are the last herd of Elephant Beings to walk the Orb.” his words trembled when spoken out loud. Every Being in the crowd squealed in shock. Anuk remained still and silent. She wanted to hear every word read out loud. Noga sat back on his tail. For the rest of that day, he read every word with all the suspense and emotions as a parent reads a bedtime story to their child.

There was not a peep from any Being! Even the waves of the sea had ceased moving. All was silent and still as the dead. All eyes were fixed on Noga and jaws dropped open to the ground.

“He’s not reading that right!” voices came from the crowd.

“That can’t be! It’s impossible!” another mumbled.

“You know what that means?” said another.

“What will we do?” asked many.

The crowd mumbled on in shock. Their eyes turned back to Noga and Anuk.

Anuk stepped next to Noga. She stood silent, staring at the crowd.

As for Noga, even while he was reading the Book of Words, he swallowed, his mouth was dry, and he gasped for air. As he closed the Book of Words with fear in his eyes, Rose and Shire went to him immediately.

Anuk announced to the crowd that there would be a Round Table Council gathering immediately following the end of the day. The end of the day was imminent. The suns were dipping back into the sea, and it was now the moons’ turn to rise out from the sea. Anuk walked briskly back to her dwelling and stood for a moment, listening with tears in her eyes to the quiet feet and whispers in and around the forest, and to the sounds of crackling trees all around her. Then she sat in her library. She placed the Book of Words on the table. She looked around the room at all the scrolls filled with poems. She had read many frightening stories but never had she felt as horrified or terrified of the words as the ones she had read today. A fresh pot of tea with yamagoos biscuits was at the centre of the table. It was the first time she had an appetite for either or for anything. She stepped towards the window and looked out at the Assisi Beings sitting quietly in the forest.

“Hello.” said Anuk. She looked back at Aye standing in the door entrance. “The tea is fresh.”

“Thank you, no.” answered Aye. She walked in and sat at the table. “I’m glad to find you here in reflection, rather than in a fit of rage.” said Aye, looking around the room at the rose trim trailing the ceiling and the wall. “I wanted to talk to you before the Round Table Council gathering. I suppose you feel angry that Ele or any of the spirit Elephant Beings had not told you what was in the Book of Words or what was to come?”

"I'm confused." said Anuk. "Though that reading does explain why we only know of this now: my heart stopped beating as I'm sure yours and the others' did as well."

"It did. You have unknowingly protected the Book of Words all these seasons, and it seemed necessary to me to review the story carefully with the Round Table Council members, which would seem to explain your imminent desire to leave Roes Island, again."

"And that would be understandable. To this day, you remain my guardian and parent as well." smiled Anuk, "and you know me all too well and always know best. You never let me forget the part I am playing in this world. I would not be here today if it were not for you. You have been my mentor through the journey of life Aye. Aye, heeding the warnings from the Book for Words will be my greatest sacrifice, ever!"

"I'm not sure about this though. It has an element of danger beyond anything you have ever known. You have had many great adventures, and you have aroused and restored, for many, the dream of Human Beings and Animals Beings, All Beings coexisting, and given them a new vision. You have shown what passion and perseverance can bring to one's life.

"I am Assisi, Aye. What is the use of all this education and knowledge if I cannot apply myself? Look how far we have come with the Custos. Just those three here on the Island and there are more out there. I have spoken with them. I need to do something. I just don't know what that is yet."

"Aye looked graciously and proudly at her. "Yes, something must be done." she said thoughtfully. "Whatever that will be will be revealed at the Round Table Council gathering."

"I can think of a few things, anyway. I want to..."

"I know what you want." interrupted Aye. "This is quite the graduation day, to say the least." Aye poured two cups of tea. "Come sit here with me." Anuk joined Aye at the table. "I hope he will..."

"Me too." said Anuk. A long slender hand with solid blue nails gently gripped the teacup. "No Being will believe he can help."

"Only time will tell." Aye sipped her tea quietly.

"He offered to help me, for a moment that was. It was on that day in the Crystal Being vessel on the beach. But he is not free to do so freely, in a manner of speaking. He ought to know in his heart with certainty that he can be a Change Maker, of course. I am still willing to trust in him, to believe in him. Ariel is the son of Empress Hayyel. But it is time he was his own master now." said Anuk and sipped her tea louder than usual.

"Ariel, a Change Maker?" said Aye. "Defy the Empress? While in the Crystal vessel, did you both come to an understanding, a mutual understanding of this? I do not recall that being the case. What I have come to know and trust about Ariel is that he will follow his heart because he too is motivated by passion and perseverance. But he can do this in a very different way than you and I can understand."

"Well, yes, I suppose this to be true as well." murmured Aye. Her eyes looked up at the scrolls tucked away within the shelves.

"Will you show them?"

"I must now." said Anuk anxiously. "I can only feel a slight tingle. Well, it's like having an artist gingerly fanning an Indian paintbrush along my back." She gestured with

her fingers. "It's brighter and complete now." she said softly to the teacup. "I noticed it this morning."

Aye looked again very graciously at Anuk, and there was a tear in her eye. "I think, Anuk," she said softly, "that I should accompany you once again. If you leave this Island, I will be there with you."

"No! Besides, we don't even know what will be decided at the Round Table gathering. And I really don't see why you should. You are of the age now where you must consider..."

"I was not asking for permission. I am of the age where that has not been necessary for many seasons." smiled Aye.

"I know, but..."

"There's no but." said Aye. "I wanted to know what was in the Book of Words and now I do. It was important that we all know. The Book of Words is, well – a road map to the way forward. As a scholar, I was interested in that Book, and I still am, but now for other reasons. I should like to study it some more, which we all will in the coming days or for many days to come I am certain. Also, I think you had quite a curiosity for this Book as well. You will not need to be illiterate for much longer, Anuk, and neither will any of us, unless they chose not to want to learn to read anything other than poetry. But I can't see this happening now that we have teachers to teach us and now that we know differently as well. I mean, we cannot deny its existence because of what it represents. The story does not change."

Anuk remained still and quiet in her chair, and only a tap of her fingers on the teacup indicated that she had reluctantly heard every word. "Yes, we cannot ignore this."

Aye stood up from her chair. She spoke softly. "You'll be risking much if you approach this in anger, Anuk," she said. "You make that anger clearer every time your ears flatten back. When you stress and feel sad, your neck muscles tense up. Use that anger wisely!"

"I'm not angry!" said Anuk staunchly.

"Anuk!" said Aye. "I've known you all these seasons, and you could never hide your true feelings from me."

"Indeed," said Anuk. She drew a deep breath.

"Anuk. What did you know about the Book of Words before today's reading?"

"Only what Noga read today. For some reason, I had a *feeling*; you know what I mean, in the pit of my gut, this overall sensation that it had something to do with the Elephant Beings. I didn't know what that could be until today."

"Yes, I know that feeling all too well." said Aye.

"I suspected of course that it had something to do with the Elephant Beings because of the gold Elephant Being painted on the bottom right corner of the each leaf," said Anuk. She took the Book of Words from the table. Her fingers pushed open to a leaf and pointed.

"Yes, me too." said Aye. "Unfortunately, my suspicions were correct but I just could not have imagined it to be as such."

"But I don't understand, I don't understand some of what was written and why." said Anuk.

"Neither do I." answered Aye. "I am now only beginning to understand the story in the Book of Words, especially, of course, after the reading, obviously. There is noo

need to dissect every word. But if you take my advice, you will have no need to do so either, or not at all. I will make sure those two big brains EagleOwl and Kinkajou do not either. At least they know as well as we know that we must keep the Book of Words safe, and keep it a secret, from this day forward! It can not be available for all on display at the library.”

“You are very fierce!”

“My dear Anuk! I am frightened.”

“What are you afraid of exactly, other than the obvious?”

“I am not quite certain. Of what was, or of what will be, or both!”

“Well, what about it?” asked Anuk.

Aye walked to the window. One of the big orange bulbous moons was shining through the window, lighting her face. “I am...”

“Nocturnal Being you are, the night brings you comfort.” said Anuk.

“How far along has it come?” asked Aye.

“It appears to be all there. I can feel it tingling more than ever now. But in a different way.” said Anuk. Her right hand reached over her left shoulder. “It feels like it’s always been between my shoulder blades.”

Anuk lowered her pink and gold silk robe from off her shoulders. The moonlight shined onto her long slender horse-like back. The gold Elephant Being tattoo between her shoulder blades glittered against her roseate tinted skin. “You see, it’s complete.” she said in her enchanted voice, an Assisi trademark.

“What do you know about this?” asked Aye. No bigger than a Rodent Being, she stepped up onto the chair. Her prominent yellowish-orange eyes took a close look at the tattoo.

“It’s more of a feeling, is what I know.”

“How do you mean?” asked Aye. She cringed her thick greying and white fleck fringe at the top of her head. Her long and bony finger with a sharp pointed claw gently brushed the Elephant Being tattoo. “Does it hurt?”

“No. But there is a constant sensation. It is more like a presence. It is like when you are in the forest and you know you’re being watched and the Being won’t reveal itself, or like when you can feel a Being standing behind you. It’s something like that.” Anuk’s heart shaped face turned to look back at Aye. With her quiet introspective features, she smiled and her plum coloured hair danced softly over her shoulder.

“I can hear them gather around the Round Table.” said Aye.

“I will have to tell them about this.”

“Yes.”

“They know Ele’s story.” said Aye. “In fact, I believe Rose knows more about it than we do, or any of us for that matter.”

“I remember our time with Ele like it was yesterday. I remember my heart pounding like it had never pounded before from fear. Then as we came closer and closer to Gibo, there appeared this huge white Elephant Being. I will never forget the images of the carnage, the Elephant Being graveyard. The severed body parts were all that was left of Ele and her family, murdered by the Poach, under the command of the Empire. After seeing this, I never felt so demoralized and disgusted. I just wanted to run home; to be back at the Inn where all was right and peaceful. Those Elephant Spirits shared their story

with us, which I know they did not have to, as painful as it was for them. I also recall what Ele said, *our story does not end here*, is what she said. You remember?

“Yes, I remember.”

“We also have the Elephant Beings to thank. They are the creators of the Round Table Council. The always consulted one another at the Round Table. Every Elephant Being at that table was equal, and each had a voice because each voice had something to say. They talked about everything at the Round Table. They helped each other find solutions to their problems. I was *speechless*, to say the least, sitting with them at our first Round Table Council gathering. Ele reminded us, she reminded us that they still had a great deal of power and influence in this world, even though they resided in those graveyards.

“Their story does not end there.” said Aye.

Aye stepped off the chair. She walked back to the window. Her eyes looked out at the Beings gathering around the Round Table.

“It’s time?” asked Anuk. “I had not expected graduation day to end like this. I had looked forward to a different ending of the day.”

“As they say, expect the unexpected. I wonder if I shall ever see my home again.”

Aye walked over to the door. “One last reminder – know the part you play in this world Anuk.”

Anuk was right behind her. She gave a glance down at the Book of Words in her hands, and walked out of her dwelling at a peaceful pace; but Anuk thought Aye looked usually distracted by her own thoughts, almost as if she was keeping a secret too heavy to bear on her own. The moons’ beams shined down onto the Round Table and the Beings figures appeared one by one around the table. Anuk stepped into the light next to Aye and Noga on her right.

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