

=={Rooting through the Past}==

It was always the same nightmare for her.

She could see nothing but red all around her.

The moon was crimson red and gave off a feeling of dread.

A dark being with flowing malice and evil eyes glaring at her.

She was in the body of another creature she had never seen before.

And at her feet was the dying form of someone, a person she had never seen before, she felt a deep connection with.

She would cry out, in anger or grief, she was never sure which or both, before a wave of blue enveloped her and-

With a gasp the yellow-furred rabbit sits up in her bed with a start, her face covered in sweat and her labored breath coming out like mist. After a few moments of waiting she realizes that she is awake and not dreaming now. The feeling of tears pricking her vision had her instinctively wiping them.

Diana was a yellow-haired Flemish Giant, or so her Grandpa told her, with golden eyes and a punk-like haircut dyed purple over her face. The only oddity about her was her fur color and the sharp bucktooth that looked like a spear tip & her sharp teeth.

"Great, another nightmare to deal with." Diana groaned, wiping away the last of her tears and laying back to stare at the ceiling. She closes her eyes to go back to sleep, yet they open once more when the curtains do, Fredric, a bear with light brown fur staring at her guiltily.

"I'm sorry about waking you Diana, but Roxanne insisted I wake you up before we're late to Ms. Calloway's Cafe" Fredric admits with a frown. His head was moved by Roxanne, a gray wolf with white hair & green highlights, with a hand to look at Diana.

"Come on, Di! It's the first day of summer and I want to get some of Ms. Calloway's Strawberry shortcake muffins today." Roxanne pouts at her while her tail swishes, Diana chuckling to her reaction.

"Alright alright, I'll get my cottontail up~" Diana hid her distress with a chuckle, turning her body to get out of bed and head for the shower, getting herself washed off and clothed properly before heading down the halls.

Arriving outside the school Diana saw her four childhood friends waiting by the gate. Along with Fredric & Roxanne, she could see Montgomery Gavher, that badass of an alligator, and Chica Calloway, the daughter of the mother who's cafe they were going to.

"Took ya long enough." Monty gruffed, adjusting the shoulder strap of his pack with a shrug.

"You deal with matted fur in the morning, then you can complain all you want, Monty." Diana shot back, a grin on her face.

The group of five walked down the street to their destination, all chatting about their plans and what they wanted to do. Roxanne couldn't wait to jam it out on the roof, Fredric was looking forward to cooking with Chica and her mom, while Monty couldn't wait to train with Roxanne's dad or Bonnibel.

Diana, however, wasn't paying attention to her friend's talking. Whenever the nightmares would come up, it left her drained and not feeling too good. She would reminisce on the nightmare all day and wonder, for the past ten years that she has been having them, why she would have them. It felt connected to her memories, yet she could never tell if it was real or a makeup of her mind from a tragedy she could no longer remember. Or maybe that was it, she did not want to remember.

Diana was pulled from her thoughts by a tug of her jacket hood, looking back to see Monty gripping the fluffy edge. "Hey! Quit day-dreaming, Diana! The cafe's right here." Monty yelled, pointing his thumb to Ms Calloway's sign 'Chicken Coop Cafe'.

"Heh, sorry Monty. Guess I was in my head yet again." Diana pushed a smile out, following the group inside the cafe.

Today was packed due to it being the start of summer, most of it being animals from Cherryton High from the city over. Everyone from the school was enjoying their respective meal of either a refreshing strawberry shortcake or one of Ms Calloway's famous banana & peanut butter muffins. Those were Diana & Roxanne's favorites.

Out from the kitchen came the hen herself, Susie Calloway, bearing yellow feathers and wearing an old fashion summer dress & apron, carrying a tray of coffee & treats. A smile was on her beak upon seeing the squad of friends.

"Oh! It's good to see all of you here! Hello Chica!~" Susie smiled happily, pecking each of them with a kiss on the cheek.

"Hi mama~ We're going to the roof to relax. But I'll be down to help with the cafe in a bit." Chica greeted, leading her friends to the door up to their family's apartments.

“That’s very helpful of you, sweetie. But I have Jeremy helping me with the food.” Susie waved them to the door, setting down the food & drink for another group of friends. “Do any of you want something for me to bring up later?”

“Hell yeah! I’ll take some shortcake muffins, Ms. Calloway!” Roxanne said with excitement, her tail wagging swiftly.

“Ah ah! Watch that language, missy!” Susie pointedly glared, her finger aimed at the tomboy wolf.

“Sorry.” Roxanne frowned, slumping a little from the hen’s scolding gaze.

That was when the bell to the little shop rang, where the five turned their gaze to see their sixth member: Bonnibel Burgundy, a grayish indigo furred rabbit with a flannel full of ferocity and a can-do attitude.

“Hey y’all! Sorry for the late arrival~” Bonnibel apologized to the five, taking her seat next to Fredric & Chica with a relaxed posture.

A chuckle left Monty’s lips as he answered, “You didn’t miss out on anything, unless you plan to have a mouth like Roxanne.” All he gets is a punch to his shoulder, causing another chuckle to leave his throat.

The squad made their way upwards towards the roof, passing by their respective parent’s doors. Everyone’s parents lived above the Chicken Coop Cafe due to it being a multi-roomed apartment. Then they passed a room with Diana’s name on it, just before reaching the roof. Diana herself just rubbed her hand across the nameplate with melancholy.

Everyone was enjoying themselves and talking about what the plans for the summer were, with Roxanne leading up with a few ideas. Fredric made sure that they weren’t going in over their heads. And Monty only fueled Roxanne’s fire when she talked, even to add a special super moon happening tonight, one not like any other in years. However, the only one not enjoying herself was Diana, too into her mind to think or register what was being said.

It was Chica who first noticed this, moving closer to the rabbit.

“Hey, what’s wrong Diana?” Chica whispers, a look of worry on her face, placing a hand on Diana’s shoulder.

Diana only blinked at this and looked at Chica for a moment before turning her head away, a sorrowful look on her face replaced with a mask of a smile. “Nothing’s wrong Chica. Just a little tired today.” It didn’t take an expert to know what was wrong.

“You had another nightmare, didn’t you?” Chica asked a little louder, drawing the attention of the others.

“I... I did. “ Diana admitted with a sigh, combing her fingers through her hair. “I always have the same damn nightmare, Chica. That hasn’t changed in the past 10 years, but without grandpa, I...” Diana turned herself away from Chica before hugging her legs to her chest. “... I miss him so much.”

The others, having dropped their earlier conversation before listening, could only frown and look in different directions, changing expressions that went from grief to something else.

“Ah know what ya mean, Diana. Ah miss Afton as well.” Monty finally chimed in, taking his signature shades off and walked over. “He was a good rabbit, through and through. He always looked out for us, and made sure I didn’t do anything stupid when I... was going through my phase.” Monty looked down to the side with a frown, taking a seat next to Diana.

“He was important to everyone, Montgomery. Afton was there for everyone when we were struggling.” Fredric nodded, looking at his friends. “But he was there for you the most, ever since you lost your parents.” Fredric stopped on Diana, looking at her with sadness.

“Yeah... and even if Grandpa was a little tough on me, it was because he cared. He showed me how to cook, how to sign, how to fix a car engine or flat, hell, he even showed me how to play the guitar.” Diana choked out, tears threatening to break. “I just miss him so much...”

A sigh came from next to Diana before she felt a hand on her shoulder, turning her head to see Roxanne knelt down by her side. “If you’re planning to go over to his place, just be careful, ok? There have been a few devourings on the streets.” Roxanne warned with a frown, gently gripping Diana’s shoulder.

“I will. I won’t be gone long.” Diana nodded, getting up and gently removing Roxanne’s hand from her shoulder. “I’ll probably be back near dusk since it’s across town. Just let your parents know.” Diana waved to them, making her way down the stairs.

Once Diana left the cafe, she was off towards her grandpa’s place, already feeling the weight of the action, but it was the only way to clear her head.

=={A few hours later}==

It wasn’t long before Diana could see the small home across the street. It had been a while since she was there to look at the place. To revisit memories she long missed and

wished to have back, as well as an important task. Already, a memory played as Diana passed a park with a cherry blossom tree in-bloom.

<{Flashback}>

Little Diana laid her head on her grandpa's lap, watching the cherry blossoms fall to the ground and on her head. Afton chuckled when one landed on her nose, merely brushing it off her nose with a smile.

"Hey Grandpa?" Little Diana asked, looking up at her grandpa.

"Yes, Di-Di?" Afton asked without taking his eyes from the scenery. "What was Grandma like?" Little Diana tilted her head.

A flash of a look came over Afton's face, but he smiled again, looking down at Little Diana with a warm smile. "She was the most wonderful woman I have ever met. She loved to sing and dance, her eyes & fur were like molten gold, and she loved telling stories~" Afton closed his eyes to reminisce on the memories.

"Oh... I'm sorry that she's gone, Grandpa." Little Diana hugged his waist a little.

"Don't be sorry, Di-Di. She was already so old when I met her, it was... just her time, I'm afraid." Afton stared at the ground when he answered, eyes tearing up a little. He wiped them away and coughed to clear his clogging throat.

"Grandpa?" Little Diana looked up at her grandpa with worry. "Will we be able to see Grandma's grave? I want to say hi to her."

"I..." Afton sighed softly, petting Little Diana's head. "Am afraid we can't, her grave is in a far-off land, way too far for a plane ride. I'm sorry, Di-Di." Afton looked down at her with a sympathetic frown.

"It's ok, Grandpa... I love you Grandpa." Little Diana hugged his waist tighter. "Forever and Always." Diana added.

Afton smiled warmly at this and wrapped his arms around his granddaughter's body. "And I love you too, Di-Di, Forever and Always."

<{Back to Present}>

When the memory ended Diana opened her eyes to feel water drenching her cheeks. She was crying again. A sigh left her lips as she made her way towards her destination, wiping the tears away.

"I wish I knew what happened to him." Diana wiped the last remaining tears dry, spotting her old home, a standalone house that her grandpa bought from the landlord.

Sadly, without him here, it was soon-to-be demolished in a few months. Her childhood home would be in ruins, the idea stung her heart.

This was why she went every now and then to her grandpa's house, to spend what time remained in the old place before the inevitable came, as well as gather anything left behind that had sentimental value. Anything she could get was better than leaving empty handed.

Something in the attic window caught Diana's attention, seeing someone stare out at her with golden eyes. Diana rubbed her own eyes, wondering if she was seeing things and looked again to find the window empty. "It must have been the glare from the sun." Diana looked towards the sun for a moment.

Diana got to the door to her grandpa's home and went inside, finding dust kicking up as she took in the barren living room. Not much was left since Diana's friends' parents took most of the things they didn't want destroyed in here. Guess it wasn't just her.

She made her way towards the stairs to where the attic was in the house, climbing up to the second floor to the door in front of the stairs. Opening it up and climbing the stairs inside Diana saw very few boxes left inside the room from the move, as well as the window where she thought she saw someone. With that worry out of the way, she moved to where her childhood room was.

Not much changed about it, with the few toys and things she didn't need. However, looking around at her old room brought back memories of simpler times, when she was a kid with her Grandpa and being homeschooled, watching cartoons with him on the couch eating peanut butter & celery. "I miss you, old man~" Diana sniffled and wiped her eyes before putting the plush wolf down onto the bed.

It was still on her mind how he went missing. Afton said that he was going on a long-distance construction trip and that he wouldn't be gone for long. The last time Diana saw him was 5 years ago, close to her 13th birthday.

Making her way back to the stairs Diana realized that she forgot to close the attic door. But when she peered inside Diana saw golden eyes staring from at the top of the stairs. She jumped back towards the stairs and grabbed the railing before she could fall, nearly having a heart attack from what she saw. Was it the same person and they were waiting for her? Without another moment, Diana rushed up the stairs to pursue whoever it was, grabbing a nail hammer left on the floor inside.

At the top Diana didn't see anyone at first, none behind what few boxes there were and no one by the window, approaching it slowly and looking around herself. At the window Diana peered out into the streets, no one in sight and the sun began to fall in the sky. With a sigh Diana turned around to leave, wondering where the intruder went.

But the golden-eyed intruder, standing taller than Diana & wearing a golden bear skull, was right there when she turned.

A scream left Diana's lungs as she swung with all her might with the hammer upwards and heard a thunk in the ceiling. When she opened her eyes the intruder was gone, nowhere in sight, not even on the floor. It was like they vanished.

"What? I swear I... I must be going crazy." Diana shook her head, her left hand rubbing it.

Looking upwards Diana saw that the hammer claws embedded into the wood planks plenty deep. A hiss left Diana's lips, grabbing it with her right hand and watching the board bend when she pulled on it. "Ugh, if Grandpa was here, he would kill me." Diana continued to pull the hammer-attached board down.

It bent beyond what should be possible before a heavy click rang out, the sound of chains clattering before part of the ceiling began to come down, stopping on the floor with a thump.

Diana saw an old chest that looked like the Aztec interpretation of a serpent's head, all made out of wood. It looked ancient, almost as ancient as some ancient society. Diana wondered why her Grandpa had it, hidden in the attic ceiling no less.

Walking over to the chest Diana checked the lock to see that it was locked with some kind of keyless lock, maybe some kind of sensor lock. She wasn't sure how to open it though, rubbing the dull green part of it. The dull color lit up before the chest unlocked, Diana blinking a few times at how it opened before slowly opening the chest.

Inside the chest was a purple pouch with an ancient crest of four triangles & a winged entity in gold & aztec artistry and an envelope that looked rather old with the symbol of the three golden triangles. She wasn't sure if she should take them...

Yet a voice in the back of her mind told her it was ok. But why?

Shaking her head at this, Diana slowly took these two things out of the chest, looking them over for more detail. That's when she saw her grandpa's handwriting on the front of the letter.

"The past will be mended with time, Afton Tanner." Diana read out the letter, confusion on her face before determination set in, opening the letter with haste to see the contents inside.

It was a photograph, high resolution at that, of two creatures Diana had never seen before, wearing ancient aztec clothing, hugging each other with one arm, smiles on their faces and their eyes on the camera.

Diana blinked a couple times as she looked at the people in the photo, flipping it over to see more writing. “‘Rauru & Sonia, Find Them’. Is that the name of these people?” Diana turned the photo back over, focusing on the two people in the photo.

That was when Diana recognized the woman from her nightmares. She was the person she cried out for. Was she important? A friend or someone close? Diana tried to think about it, yet it only yielded a growing headache. “Damn this headache, geez.” Diana growled, pocketing the photo & envelope carefully.

When Diana opened the pouch she emptied the contents into her left hand. It was a small stone no bigger than her thumb, shaped like a teardrop and gently shining a pale pearl color. And wrapped with simple hemp in a Maori-style knot.

“Woah. This is beautiful.” Diana turned towards the light outside, holding the stone to the light to see it better. She swore she could see the light shifting inside it, like a form of liquid.

Then Diana noticed the sun was starting to fall in the sky in the distance. It would be late when she got back. “Ah crap! I took too long here! I gotta get going!” Diana scrambled out of the attic, locking everything behind herself before heading down the street.

In the window the golden bear skulled ghost watched Diana run off home, its expression hidden as it watched the rabbit run back home before fading from the world.

==={At the Chicken Coop Cafe}===

Diana ran into the cafe just as the clock struck 9pm on the dot, huffing and puffing after the literal dash she made back home. When she looked up she saw both Ms. Calloway and Monty’s caretaker, a purple-furred rabbit named Jeremy Barburel, cleaning up the cafe after it closed right at the time of Diana’s arrival.

“Well look who’s back to see us.” Jeremy leaned on the counter, a smile on his lips. “Where have you been off to, Little Rabbit?” The rabbit questioned.

“Ah, I was at... grandpa’s.” Diana walked to the door leading upstairs.

“Ah, had another nightmare then?” Jeremy asked softly, getting a nod from Diana. “I won’t ask for details. I just hope seeing your old man’s place helped.”

“It did, Mr. Barburel.” Diana nodded, making her way up to the roof of the apartment.

All her friends were there on the roof inside Mr. Cortevo’s dojo/home, seeing both Fredric & Monty sparring it out. The former was wielding a shinai and the latter wielding

a bo staff like a polearm. Diana could only bet it was because of an argument over a food or scenario that fitted with whatever they were fighting about right now, all while Bonnibel just laughed at their antics. Diana only shook her head with a soft smile.

Around her were a few tents set up for the night outside. Diana remembered that they talked about a super moon or something, however, it looked like the clouds were going to block them out. Diana made her way to the tents and spotted a yellow one reserved for her, smiling at the note that Chica made for her.

“That’s nice of her to do~” Diana commented, making her way to the edge of the apartment, taking a seat on it.

The city on nights like these was a beauty to behold with all its lights and the life running through it. Diana pulled out the pearl-like tear stone necklace she found, looking at its smooth surface and faint glow over. Soon Diana heard voices coming out of the dojo, sounding like Fredric won yet again.

“I’m not giving up on this Fredric! Egg Rolls are a superior food!” Monty glared at Fredric, pointing his left hand finger.

“I was just saying that curry was my favorite, Monty. I wasn’t starting a fuss about anything.” Fredric deflected, holding his hands up.

“Uh-huh, sure.” Monty rolled his eyes.

Roxanne was the first to notice Diana on the edge staring out towards the city. “Hey Di! How was your day?” Roxanne hugged the rabbit with a toothy smile.

“Oh, uh, it was alright.” Diana shook her head, continuing to stare at the stone.

“Hey, whatcha got there?” Roxanne leaned forward against Diana, noticing the stone necklace in the rabbit’s hands.

“Hey, careful! Not while we’re over the ledge here.” Diana complained, pushing herself & Roxanne away from the edge. “As for the prior question, I’m not sure. I found it at grandpa’s.” Diana walked over to the tents, taking a seat in front of her own, holding up the stone necklace for everyone else to see now.

They all gawked and admired the way the stone looked, a couple whispering while Fredric leaned forward to examine it further. A look came upon his face upon seeing it, but changed it quickly as he explained, “I’ve seen my fair share of gems & stones, however, this stone is something else that, sadly, I can’t quite explain.” Fredric admitted, leaning back to give Diana room.

“Yeah me too, big guy.” Diana looked at the stone some more, getting lost in staring at it.

Everyone noticed the distant look on Diana’s face, concerned looks on their own faces.

“Did you find something else at the house? Are you ok?” Chica piped up, ringing her hands a little.

“Hm. . . Nah, I’m alright. Just this stone.” Diana lied, giving a false smile to put them at ease.

Later that night when everyone was asleep due to the super moon being a no-show, Diana still remained awake in her tent. She could not fall asleep no matter how much she tossed & turned. Questions were rolling through her mind on what she found.

Getting up and out of the tent Diana got her pants & jacket back on, walking over to the ledge where she rested her arms onto it. She took out the photo of the two people from its envelope & the pearl-colored tear stone from the emblem-sewn purple pouch, staring at the three with a frown.

Her grandpa hadn’t been seen in 5 years, no trace of him was found, no records, no evidence, not even a scent of him. And now, after 5 years of grieving and nightmares, Diana found more questions than answers with the photo and the stone in her hands right now.

“I just don’t understand. Why leave these for me?” Diana looked at the photo. “Why do you have a photo with someone I know only from my nightmares? Who even is this... person next to her?” Then Diana looked at the tear stone. “And what does this stone even mean? Why was it in this pouch? What’s with the crest? You’ve just left only more questions than answers...” Diana sighed deeply, leaning more on the ledge, a frown on her face with tears forming, her ears against her head. “I just... I want to know the truth.” Diana looked to the stone, holding it up to what little light there was.

Staring at the stone Diana noticed that the wind began to pick up, blowing through the city and moving the clouds. She looked around at this, worried a storm was about to blow in. That’s when Diana noticed the glow from her right hand.

The stone’s shine began to take on a purple glow, shining of gold and pearl within the stone, as well as other color mixing within. It sized up a couple pulses in her hand until it was almost the size of her own palm, the hemp snapping off. Then Diana watched as markings etched onto it before solidifying with a ching.

“Huh? What is...” Diana could only stare at this in bewilderment, blinking at the stone as she turned it over in her left hand, pocketing the photo. Then she noticed the sky was

slowly turning a shade of red and the glow of the stone only grew. Diana felt a jolt going up her left arm, a gasp of shock escaping her as the stone flowed lines of gold & green ribbons up her arm.

“W-What the hell!?” Diana rubbed sporadically, failing to remove the ribbons as they flowed across her body. Above in the sky the clouds parted to reveal a blood red moon, like the one Diana saw in her nightmares. This wasn’t a nightmare though, it was real.

The others in their tents groggily got up to Diana’s shouts, Roxanne & Chica sharing a tent, ready to question their friend for her yelling. That was dropped when they all saw what was happening to Diana, yelling her name as they rushed over to try and help her.

“Get it off! Get it off!” Diana shouted, tears welling in her eyes, holding onto Monty’s arms around her waist.

“I’m trying!” Fredric yelled, pulling on the stone that was now stuck in Diana’s left hand.

The ribbons of gold & green enveloped all of Diana’s left arm, who yelled out her friend’s names, as the moon was at its highest. Monty kept hold of Diana’s waist with Chica helping to pull on his back and Fredric & Roxanne were pulling on the stone to pry it from Diana, even Bonnibel grabbed her arm to try and aid in its removal, yet it wouldn’t budge.

Particles of black & red began to form all around them, the air became thick with a strange energy that no one could understand. Then, a blinding golden light erupted from the stone, and all was blinded by light.

Where the six once stood now laid a bed of tall yellow grass, with Sundelions, Silent Princesses, Brightbloom flowers and a strange flower, one that looked like a lotus flower with light lavender & purple-edged petals and a dragon-shaped mouth at its center, all blowing in the wind. The surrounding stone was turned into some ancient stone with unknown patterns.

Above in the sky, the Blood Moon remained for a time, lurking above like a massive wound in the stars above. Resting upon the bed now was the spirit that Diana saw, holding one of the dragon lotuses in her hands.

“May you find the truth, Diana.” The ghost proclaimed, slowly fading out as the moon returned to normal. The lotus fell to the golden grass below, amongst the rest of the bloomed flowers.