

Golden Reeds by Helix

*Flowers on the Trail.*

*An Endless Sky*

*We lie there*

*Everyday life becomes memories.*

*Wind blows through the fields.*

*At the end.*

*Flowers on the Trail. ~ Flowers on the Trail, Chikayo Fukuda*

A single nightingale shrilled in the distance, a poor companion for the cacophony of crickets trilling in the cool night air.

Tobin suppressed a small shudder as he pushed his way through the foliage. His fur prickled as each leaf stroked through his shaggy fur. "I don't like this," the yak boy called after his three companions who were ahead.

"Relax Tobes," the grey wolf youth, Galen, responded with a nonchalant wave.

"But the elders say to stay away from the burn-smell places." Tobin rubbed his small horns with his hard, black finger tips timidly. His grey smock swayed a bit as a small stirred up breeze rattled through the small wood the group had entered.

"There's no sickness, my brother and his friends come here all the time," Galen stated, skipping across several large stones in the small creek bed. "Nothing but the ghosts that is."

There was a splash. "Ghosts?" the orange bobtail cat cried from where he had slipped.

"That's not funny," Belvit, the bunny girl, shot to Galen before lending a white furred hand to help her cat friend up. "You ok Benz?"

"Thanks," he stammered, putting his glasses back to his nose. Then took them off and wiped them again. "Ghosts are not real Galen; it's made-up stories to scare kindred." The cat puffed up his chest, trying to seem braver.

"Sure, whatever you say brains," Galen laughed again, his teeth glinting in the soft moonlight. "Come on, let's go."

Tobin gazed between the trio back and forth thinking. "What if the elders find out?"

"They won't, Tobes, it's still an hour before den time," Galen shot back, looking over his shoulder.

With a sigh Tobin rubbed his sleeve and continued on, nerves wracking his heart; it certainly did not feel right.

In his ponderings, the boy had not realized the change in scene. His hoofs hitting soft grass instead of old leaf fall and rock brought his attention back to reality.

"Wow," Benz called out.

"It's beautiful," Belvit said, joy in her voice.

Before the youth was a sea of sunflowers. The field sat there gold and yellow, bending back and forth in the faint breeze. Green and gold lights flickered as lighting bugs dove between the flower stocks.

The kids all stood at the forest's edge upon a rocky knoll overlooking the fields. In the flowers' midst stood crumbling buildings old.

Tobin's nose flared with the faint acidic burn smell. His tail swished as the lighting bugs flew by.

It was a very beautiful sight. Already the others made their way down the hill into the flowers.

"You coming?" Benz looked at the yak. The cat's eyes were so very large and seemingly innocent behind those glasses.

The Yak gave a snort, running down the hill into the field. The plants felt nice against his thick fur. The green scent overcame that ancient forbidding odor lingering at the back of his mind. He passed his hands across those reeds. It was a calming sensation to his nerves.

Belvit ran by laughing, chasing after Galen, his white tail bobbing. Benz had sat studying a firefly perched on a flower petal. It startled, flying at his nose. He could not suppress his giggle.

It was all so peaceful. Tobin hadn't been this far from the village besides the trade caravan with father. It was a relief as so many plants and bugs could not grow in a place of sickness. There was nothing but peace and child's laughter.

Belvit stopped dead in her tracks. Large lupine ears gave a mighty spasm.

"What's going on?" Galen stopped puzzled; his mouth fell agape.

Benz stood up from his rock study and began to shake.

The kids had stopped playing, yet children still happily laughed.

"*Lavra,*" the voice called. A child laughed harder in response. The fur on Galen's back stood on edge. The children looked around for the source of disembodied voices. "I don't smell anyone," the boy murmured in a whimper backing up to his friends.

"*Lavra, Vy bizhte zanadto shvydko,*" the voice eerily said again. Light flickered and silhouettes appeared gold and spacey like, reflecting the yellow plants around them. A tiny whirling sound like many flies trapped in a butter trap reached the children's ears. The figures moved without bending the grass, a boy and woman. They were tall, pale things and completely see-through. The transparent mother and child stood in those reeds, clad in white and red embroidered vyshyvanka and plakhta.

"Ghosts..." shouted Benz.

"No dip," Galen cried, "let's get out of here." He ran, dodging the unearthly woman that was nearby. Velvit and Benz followed suit as fast as they could. They were in such a hurry they accidentally bowled over Tobin, leaving the yak behind. The boy stood up, blood ringing in his ears, smock dirty. He surely was to get a talk to from his momma and poppa and no way he could out explain himself to the elders where he had been now. He froze, heart clenching in his chest. He was unable to move. The gold see-through child with nothing but blonde fur on its head ran at him. As it made contact Tobin clenched his eyes shut. Nothing happened; he opened them.

"*Mamo, sonyashnyky krasyyi.*" Tobin span around seeing the child on the opposite side of him picking up ghostly sunflowers.

"*My prynesly yikh iz zemli. My prynesly yikh na z-hadku dodomu. Vony – kvity domu,*" the woman said by the child's side staring lovingly.

Tobin could just stare in apprehension. The ghosts did not seem to see him. He trembled, walking forward, passing a hand through the woman. The light swirled a bit but nothing happened. She did not care. Her face did not change from that happy smile of mother to child.

"*Kvitka nese krov zemli ta yiyi lyudey,*" she smiled. "*Vse z davnikh-daven.*"

"Uh hello?" Tobin asked with a wave at the woman's face. She made no response to the boy's actions.

"*Davayte prynesemo tatovi kvity, koly vin pryde dodomu,*" she said sullenly starting off into

space a bit.

“There you are Tobin,” an old voice croaked. The boy bleated a scream as a leathery, old hand grabbed Tobin by the shoulder.

“Elder Yizhachok,” Tobin let out a sigh of relief and resignation. The boy looked up at the old hedgehog in his huddled robes as he leaned on his cane.

“The others came back to the den bawling about ghosts, that they had eaten you.” The hedgehog man blinked his beady eyes. “Clearly,” he pointed with his paw to the glittering pair moving with a handful of flowers. “Point stands, this is not a place where kits should be, but despite your size, I always commend your bravery to do the right thing. Will take your fellow kits a long time to grow to that,” Yizhachok nodded to the boy. “You stayed to watch when the others did not.”

“Are they actually ghosts?” the boy asked the elder.

“In a way yes, the land has a means of remembering things, important things, sad things, old starman magic,” the elder said pointing up.

“So those are starmen?” The child’s eyes grew wide with awe.

“Yes, but now let’s go back the village,” the hedgehog said, turning around to head up the hill, holding Tobin’s arm.

“They are picking flowers?” Tobin questioned. “They have souls?” The boy had stopped, yanking away from the elder’s touch.

Old, wise Yizhachok pondered a bit, squinting his eyes wondering what his fellow elder Vedmid would say.

“The starmen rule and fight over the stars, they are not like us good creatures in many regards Tobin, but the land remembers what is good. Soul, people, and land are one and the same. Perhaps the starmen have lost this and that is why they fight over the stars? Perhaps though up above there are starmen who still collect flowers remembering what peace is. Remember this. We might never walk the stars like starmen, but we can know what peace is, and it is what makes us good creatures. A promise in the heart for a better tomorrow.” The old hedgehog glared at the crumbling ruins, many like that stretching far beyond the wood to the tall sharp towers crawling with the dying sickness. “A forever promise all good creatures face, again and again, that we can do better, make the right choice, and there is always tomorrow.”

The boy looked up respectfully to his teacher and gave a nod. “Let’s go home.”

“Yes lets,” Yizachok too nodded.

“*Lavra, Davayte yty dodomu,*” the ghost spoke. The whirling sound gave way as the two good creatures walked their way up the hill, the lights and ghosts behind them winking out like the fireflies to dance again at a later time. Morning would approach in due passing, a better tomorrow. It all disappeared leaving behind sunflower fields and a simple promise.

“*Ne zabuvayte, myr – tse obitsyanka sertsya,*” the mother’s voice quietly whispered in those golden reeds.

