

Of Old Nightmares

Year 3020 – Almost nine years later.

The furthest house upon the cliff was old, grey, and overtaken by nature. The big house held secrets. Many secrets. Stories were told of ghosts, of vampires and most peculiarly, of an old hag gone mad. Though everyone knew the true story of how it came to be a place of fear in the city, only the young siblings knew the whole truth.

The pair would peer through blackened windows, past the overgrowth and watch playing children pause to stare at the house before they ran away. They envied the way they could simply be.

They would sigh, laugh, and cry together. Sleep side by side or apart. Pore over dusty books from their brother's collection. Eat with mild chatter, tidy away, then play an old game they'd found in the attic.

They survived, but without living.

The eldest lay dreaming of the life they had once lived. The youngest lay dreaming of the life they could have lived. The girl with the light blue hair tossed and turned under her covers. The curse of their family affected her more than her brother. In dreams, she would never forget that fateful day. Though memories from before faded all too fast, her nightmares would never cease.

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"Elian. Please, my dear, you don't have to do this."

Lia stood in the middle of the living room. Zuri and Emin, only six and four, huddled behind her. She held up her hands in a half-surrender. She had no weapons.

"Oh, shut up! Your voice is annoying." Elian leant against the wall by the door. With a grin on her face, she twirled her sword in her hand. Her short blue hair was sticky with the blood of her family.

"You can stop right now," she pleaded, though she knew, she had always known, this was how it would end. She just didn't know before that it wouldn't just be her end. "Just don't hurt them."

"Why?"

"We're family!"

Her lips curled back into a smile, eyes narrowed. "You did see who I just killed, didn't you?"

"This isn't you... Fight Elian, I don't... I don't want to hurt you."

"As if you would have the guts. You barely even have any magic now anyway," she said with a slight giggle that didn't belong to the stoic girl. "Hideki gave me a pretty handy device to drain you of it."

Elian raised a hand surrounded by fiery light. She looked over to Zuri and lunged with her sword. Blood splattered across the room. And Lia stood still in shock. Zuri stared at the point of the blade, stopped just before her eyes. Blood soaked into Lia's grey top. Lia held herself up, unable to move as the blade heated, then cooled. Elian twisted the blade and swiftly pulled it out, and Lia finally dropped to the floor. Her breath rattled.

Zuri cradled her little brother and held herself in front, staring at Elian. Her little chin jutted out, and her face contorted as Lia placed a shaky hand over her wound. Her attempt to heal herself was futile. She made eye contact as Lia's teary eyes became dull. There was nothing more she could do.

Elian bent down to them. "I've killed all of them. No one can protect you now."

Zuri sobbed and clutched Emin tighter. Elian's voice was different. It was harsh, cold, not hers. Her eyes were red. Not blue, not gold. The most bloodthirsty red. She stood to her towering height and stepped closer once more, blade raised in the air. Then, she dropped it and stumbled back. Her

hands rose to her head, and she looked around. She looked at Lia, then her bloodied hands, and once more into Zuri's fearful eyes.

She ran.

The front door slammed shut within seconds, and Zuri crawled over to Lia, followed by little Emin, who stumbled over. Lia gasped for air; she spluttered instead. She opened and closed her mouth as she raised her hands. She placed her red hands on Zuri and Emin's cheeks.

Using the last of her healing magic, she smiled and choked out, "I love you both."

Her hands slipped from their faces. Blood smeared across their snowy white skin. Zuri pressed her hands on the wound and held the way her mother had taught her. But the blood stopped pooling. And she took her hands away with a sob of her name.

"What's happening? Why isn't she talking anymore?" Emin cried; he had the slightest lisp. He pushed at Lia, trying to shake her awake.

Not ignorant of death at her young age, she knew exactly what had happened. She reached up and gently pressed her sister's eyes closed. The blue of her dead eyes was still visible through the gap of her eyelids.

"Zuri!" Emin hit the floor with his little fists. "What's happening?"

Zuri brought her brother back into her arms, still by the side of Lia's body. Rocking back and forth. Back and forth. Until the door slammed open again.

It was supposed to be help.

But help was still minutes away.

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"Zuri, wake up!"

She gasped.

Emin stopped shaking her. He stared, struggling to find the words he wanted to say. The room was cold. Ice had spread across the room in her fitful sleep. Cold spirals decorated her sheets.

"Are you okay?" he asked, reaching out with his pale hand.

She took a moment to find her voice and wiped her eyes of stupid tears. She kissed his forehead. "I'm fine. I'm going to go outside for a little bit. Need a breather."

"Okay." Emin stayed knelt by her bed as Zuri got up and walked to the door. "You dreamt of - the day again, didn't you?"

Zuri held the doorframe, head spinning. "Yes."

She ignored his quiet. "I'm sorry."

*After involuntarily pausing at the step down from her side of the house, she forced herself to walk past her parents' room and down the stairs. A thin sheet of ice coated the bannister under her tight grip. As she continued, it melted. A faint *drip, drip* onto the carpet. As it came about from her magic, Nature would soon evaporate the water away.*

She left the house through the kitchen's glass doors and walked up the steps to the garden's grass. Beneath the weeping willow, she held out a hand. Her light-coloured magic surrounded her skin, and she cupped it around in the air, holding her palm up. A vague shape of a bird appeared in her palm, and she let the ice melt into a puddle. Her heart calmed in her chest. Every time she woke up without control of her power, she worried she'd be unable to regain it.

She created another miniature sculpture, a blob of a tree, trying to hone her fine control. As it stood in her hands, she sent out her energy, a light hum under her skin, pulling in more freezing water. The leaves of the tree became more distinct as the ice grew.

The morning sky was still dark, early June. Slithers of orange and pink light rose through pale clouds. That morning, Emin had woken from the cold that had filled the entire house. Some nights, she slept under several blankets, and by the time she woke, sheets of ice had formed between them. More often than not, she would wake in shivers, trembles. Her body remained uncontrollable until the cold finally receded. Then, she would lay awake the next few nights until she fell asleep out of pure necessity. The dark circles under her eyes worsened.

Once she calmed, she rose to her bare feet. Blades of dewy grass tickled her skin. Instead of going inside, she climbed the ladder to the high roof, catching glimpses of her sibling's attic rooms as she passed the windows. She sat on the roof as the night sky disappeared from sight. Time passed like mere moments, and soon, the blistering sun had risen low in the sky. In the garden of the house closest to hers played the little children, their parents sat drinking juice on the bench. She climbed down. She couldn't let them see her.

Because *they* would know.

"You okay?" Emin buttered toast for the two of them. He watched her, waiting to read her true answer.

"Yeah, you?"

During the day, they never discussed that horror. Only in the dead of night, when all inhibitions were lost, and the pain became too much, did they clamber into one another's beds and talk in low voices as their tears dampened the sheets.

"I'm doing great." He wasn't quite lying.

She smiled. "Thanks for breakfast."

Though they ate in silence, they held hands across the table and gave encouraging smiles. Emin's smiles were small, but more frequent than they once were.

Emin went to wash their plates, and Zuri left the kitchen. The cupboard under the stairs had a large door designed for her tall siblings to walk in with ease. It had a lock, and she pulled a chain from under her shirt. It was one of two silver chains and held a silver key.

She stepped inside. It wasn't exactly a cupboard. Rather, it was a small, cramped room filled with bottles, metal scraps, jars of gemstones and dried plants. It had two countertops, one on each side. The one with the slanted section of ceiling above it held a wooden rack of drying leaves and petals. Lavender, tied in bunches, hung from little hooks on the ceiling. On the other side of the room, she pushed bottles filled with coloured liquids, powders, and herbs away from the edge and opened a small cupboard.

Held on a rack inside was a silver sword. She stared at the engravings along the fuller that she had spent so long on. Little swirls and Emin's name in Roman letters to match the YATO on the opposite side. Its handle was wrapped in black bandages, specially made for Yato's sword-making endeavours. It was one of many swords Yato had made.

He used to go to the weapons shop to make his blades. Once each had been perfected, he'd taken it into that very room under the stairs and used a machine that sat under one of the counters to engrave his name into it. Just as he did with all his personal weapons, she'd used it herself. It took her hours to learn how to turn it on.

She locked the room and held the sword behind her to hide it as she returned to Emin. He looked over from the sink, where he placed the final spotless dish on the drying rack. He tilted his head, bright white hair falling into his eyes.

"What's that?" His eyes narrowed, and he stretched his neck to try and catch a glimpse, pulling off his gloves.

"You do know the date, right?"

"It's the fourth of June?"

She swayed side-to-side with a smile. "Yes, do you remember why it's so important?"

"No?" he asked with a little laugh. Her heart fell in her chest, but her facial expression didn't change at all.

Zuri held out the sword. "Happy birthday, Emin. You're twelve."

His eyes shone as he took the sword. "I completely forgot." His voice was soft. He traced over the intricate, delicate, shallow engravings and smiled brightly when he saw his name. The reflection skittered across the room as he twisted it in the light.

"Do... do you like it?" She rubbed her hands together and then clasped them tightly.

"Like it? Sis, I love it!"

"I'm so glad." Zuri brought him closer and ruffled his hair. He placed the sword down and hugged her tightly. An action that never failed to make her eyes blur with tears. She never let them fall if she could help it.

She was meant to be emotionless. Then, she'd always have the upper hand. But she couldn't help herself when it came to Emin. Her family meant everything, and he was all she had left.

"How long did that take you?"

"I don't even remember. You know I have no artistic talent."

"Well, I think it's perfect." He jumped slightly on his heels with a smile, and she tapped his nose.

Before she left the room, she looked back at him. He stood preparing potatoes to cook later. His shirt, once Lia's, was far too wide on his thin frame. Lia had been thin enough when she was thirteen. When she put the shirt into the hand-me-down box. It remained unbelievably large on him.

His cheeks hadn't sunk in as much as Zuri's. His bone structure left them looking more rounded. His eyes were as sunken as her own, partially from their father's deeper-set eyes that gave them an already shadowed appearance that exaggerated their dark circles. She'd been giving him extra of their well-rationed food. Her body could handle a little less. And yet, he was still worse off. She smiled at him when he turned. Her worries were silent. He already knew. She knew he knew. Neither of them brought it up.