

Lost in Starlight - World Collection 2021

Release VII of *WindySilver's
World Collections 2021*

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Lost in Starlight - World Collection 2021

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About this collection

Lost in Starlight (as it is currently titled) is a fantasy world set into a world inhabited by things like ghouls, monsters, angels and, of course, humans. The story follows Unar, who has to master the Harmony Blade so that he can defeat the ghoul extorting his home village.

This world, somehow, ended up sprouting from its titular story, [*Lost in Starlight*](#) (which I decided to put as the first story, since with its shortness it kind of acts like a tagline), and since then it has grown far beyond what it originally was. Two of the stories here, namely [*Pondering for the End*](#) and [*Unexpectedly Bad Reactions*](#), are actually previously unreleased.

The stories, aside from [*Lost in Starlight*](#), which serves as a tagline of sorts, are in chronological order, although [*The Son of a Hero*](#) is set before the main storyline and acts as a prologue. There is also a major gap between the beginning of the story, and the next story written, [*The Deed Had to Be Done*](#), as is between it and [*Song of Fear*](#). [*Angel of the City*](#) does not have an exact placement, as it features a character not connected to Unar's quest, but I felt that it was the best set right after [*Song of Fear*](#). There are also considerable gaps between [*Two People*](#) and [*A Break at a Lake*](#) and the latter and [*Pondering for the End*](#).

Lost in Starlight

Currently uncollected

Made for [Flash Fiction Competition's Round 1](#). The prompt:
a story in 140 characters.

The stars twinkled at me. I wanted to reach them, but I knew that it was far too late for that. The blade was against my throat. I had lost.

The Son of a Hero

Collected in [Searthern Dangers](#)

Prompt: *Did I just get compared to a hedgehog?!* by [WindySilver](#).

Challenge: Imply the trope [Dying Moment of Awesome](#) and include a wannabe character in the story.

He had been a marvelous warrior, a true hero. My father, I mean. He was a proficient warrior when he was my age, tall and powerful, and later he became a true hero.

Me? I want to be just like him. Tall and powerful, a warrior worthy of carrying his name and blood, and maybe, one day, even become a hero while making the ultimate sacrifice to protect my family just like he did.

That's why I carry my head high, lift heavy objects to strengthen my muscles and work hard to become what I aspire to be. I want to make my father and my mother proud.

Yet even though I do my best to bring honor to my village, all I get are snickers, "Look at that, the boy is now a bit taller than a hedgehog standing on its back feet!"

Damn, not this crap again... Seriously, why do they compare me to a hedgehog? My hair isn't even spiky or anything! Nothing about me is like a hedgehog!

You'll see... You'll all see me triumphant like my father one day... And then we'll see who is the hedgehog here...

The Deed Had to Be Done

Currently uncollected

[Prose-ject Flash Lit February 2019](#). Pick at least one prompt from the week's list and write a flash lit in 15 minutes.

Week 4: *harmony, blade & quiet*

When I lifted the Harmony Blade, everything was quiet. The lush forest was serene, as if the sword itself had brought such tranquility into it. If so, I wonder what this place will be like when I take the sword away from its centuries-old resting place.

Cutting the vines that had been protecting the Harmony Blade for so many years felt bad, but I knew that I had to do this. I needed this very sword to do what I was supposed to do. That was what my father's spirit wanted, after all.

Forgive me, Mother Nature, for this deed.

Please, do have mercy on me when I set forth to fulfill my duty, my destiny...

Song of Fear

Currently uncollected

[Prose-ject 2020](#) day 5. Prompt: [Symphony for falling angels](#) by [AdriaticaCreation](#).

The Harmony Blade and I weren't exactly good terms. I wasn't sure what was going on, but its powers weren't in sync with my movements and intents. As long as it didn't work, the magic blade was little more than an ordinary sword; in fact, it was more dangerous as its effects could put me in danger when I couldn't control them.

What made matters worse was that I had little to no idea how I could, as a soothsayer along the way had put it, "earn its trust". I had already tried plenty of things ranging from fasting and meditating to slaying monsters to protect innocent villages, but nothing had made remarkable differences. So far, the monster slaying had made the most progress, so I had set out to find more and bigger threats.

My search had now led me to mountaintop ruins at a place where the sky was darkened purple and the air filled with unsettling violin music. The notes struck fear into people's bones — mine included — so no one had dared to approach the ruins after the sky had changed around it.

No one before me. Even though I was frightened, I knew there was something wrong. Something that hopefully would help me earn my sword's trust once neutralized.

Therefore, I had hiked there, braving the fear and trying to ignore the sickening red stripes of hurtful magic that appeared some distance away from the ruins. The black

feathers that rained from the sky, however, were more difficult to ignore. Whatever monster I was going to put myself up against, it certainly wasn't anything easy to kill.

At the ruins, the magic hung threatening and the music induced a constant panic attack within me. My body wanted to turn back and run back where I had come from, but I had decided to do this. If I ran away now, I would never be worthy of the Harmony Blade, let alone able to defeat the ghoul that was extorting my village for the blood of the children.

I pushed forward, one step at a time, the Harmony Blade at ready in front of me. I found the source of the music at the center of the ruins in the middle of the most powerful spells I had ever seen. It was a person, knelt on the ground, playing a burning violin. Their long, black hair hid their face.

Then they stopped playing and spread their huge black-feathered wings.

It was a fallen angel.

The panic attack still raged through me, but I stood still, staring at the angel, awestruck. I had never seen one before.

What was a fallen angel even doing here, playing a melody of fear and conjuring hurtful magic this strong?

"What do you seek, fearful traveller?" the angel asked with a feminine voice. She did not look up from her violin.

"I..." I tried to find an answer. "I seek answers."

"Answers to what?"

"To what has changed these ruins so drastically."

"That would be me."

I wasn't surprised at all. "Why? Who are you?"

"I am a fallen angel. I play this song for the memory of those who have fallen as well and suffered because of it."

"Why here?"

The angel took a while to answer. "This is where I fell when they cast me out."

I knelt to be on her level, sheathing the Harmony Blade at the same time. "Why were you cast out?"

"I fell in love with someone from this world against our rules. I... I thought I could find happiness here but... she pushed me away when I came to her as well." The angel took a deep breath, her outstretched wings quivering with the rest of her body. "I am alone. I have nothing but the memories of those who I looked down upon for falling. Yet here I am as well. I am... just as bad as them."

Then the angel broke into tears. I let her weep, trying to come up with something to say.

Suddenly, the right reply hit me. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I have nothing left in my life," the angel cried. She still did not show her face. "There's nothing for me anywhere anymore. I've at failed everything I was born to do, even loving."

I had not been looking for a situation like this, but somehow it felt right. "Would you like to give yourself a new purpose and travel with me?"

For the first time, the angel looked up, revealing her deep brown eyes and strangely humane face. Had it not been for the wings, she could have easily passed as a normal human being. "What do you mean? Travel with you?"

"Yes. I am looking to master my sword, and a companion to share the travels with would not hurt." My gut should have told that it was a bad idea to invite a being that was clearly a powerful magician of hurtful spells to travel by my side, but somehow I couldn't help myself. Something in this fallen angel made me feel that I should help her this way.

The angel studied my face, clearly looking for deception.
"Do you... mean it? Do you truly mean I could go with you?"
"I do."

With shaking hands, the angel set her violin down. The hurtful magic was already starting to fade. A careful smile made its way onto her lips.

"I would like that."

I smiled. "Fantastic!" I stood up, walked to her and gave her my hand. "I'm Unar."

The angel took my hand and stood up. "I'm Ria."

"Pleasure to meet you, Ria."

"Likewise." Now that she had stopped crying, Ria had a timid demeanor. She let go of my hand and avoided my eyes, as if she was ashamed of needing help.

"Is there anything that needs to be done to undo this magic?" I asked, gesturing at the sky and the fading stripes.

"They'll fade in time." Ria picked her violin up, folding her wings. The fire on it had disappeared and as she held it, it disappeared in smoke. "I'm ready to go."

"Then let's head back," I said. "Follow me."

As Ria and I started to descend the mountain, sharing our skillsets and life stories with one another, I felt strangely serene. It felt like I had been meant to do this and I had done everything right.

What's more, I could feel that the Harmony Blade approved what I had done.

I must be on the right track now.

An Angel of the City

Collected in [Hunting Inklings](#)

Prompt: *He was an Angel of the City.* by [SpearHawk](#).

Lasmis was an Angel of the City, one of the numerous. While there were many Angels traversing the Wilderness, most hidden from the Humanity's sight, most of the Angels were in the City conjured in the stars.

Then there were the Fallen who had been cast out of the City into the Wilderness to fend off on their own. They were not welcome in the City anymore, not after breaking the rules. Once a breaker, always a breaker. They had to be cast out at the first offense lest they cause chaos and spread their rot further into the population.

The same applied to his friend Ria. Lasmis had been aghast to hear that she had fallen — she had never seemed to be one to fall — but after the shock had worn off, he had accepted it. Whatever had caused Ria to fall, she deserved whatever she encountered in the Wilderness.

Lasmis did not expect to see her again even if he chose to travel to the vast Wilderness to find her, let alone see her in the City to become one of the Reconciled, those who had fallen yet come back to take the oath to follow the rules once again at the risk of being forever cast out as a Demon, should they fall again. The Fallen hardly ever came back with such intentions, although he did not expect her to come back at all. Fallen or not, Ria had never been one for violence, not even after being wronged.

He could only hope that he was right about that when it came to her.

He did not want to raise his sword against his friend under any circumstances, no matter what she had become.

Dancing Angel in The Night

Currently uncollected

[Prose-ject 2020](#) day 7. Prompt: *dancing in the night*.

While Ria seemed to be safe to be with, the first nights we spent at the same camp I could not help keeping my guard up. Taking her with me had been risky and reckless enough even though the Harmony Blade seemed to approve it. She could easily turn on me in my sleep and hex me — she had been a powerful mage even on angel standards before falling, and it appeared that that had not changed. Only now she was far more capable of using hurtful magic, as the magic over the ruins had proved. She had told me that she still could use mending magic the way she used to, but her status as a fallen angel and the heartbreak had made her more focused on hurting everything around herself.

Whether that is true or not remains to be seen. Ever since leaving the ruins, she has not used magic at all — there hasn't been any need for it — so I have no proof of her capabilities yet.

On the seventh night after leaving the ruins, when I was drifting to sleep, I heard her get up. However, her footsteps did not come towards me but went away instead. Once I stopped hearing the footsteps, I turned to see where she was going.

Then I saw what was going on.

She was dancing in the meadow we were camping next to. The crescent gave only a little light, but she still danced around the flowers without a single slip or

stumble. I could only barely see her face, but I could have sworn that I saw her smile.

At some point, she stopped and came back to the camp. I decided to close my eyes and wait for her to come back. She probably did not want me to see her dance.

Once at the camp, Ria sat down and said, "You were watching, weren't you?"

I snapped my eyes open and sat up. "How did you know?" "Angels have a better eyesight than humans even at night." Ria leaned back to look at the stars. "It's been ages since I last danced. It was... it was before I fell. I had forgotten how good it felt."

"I take it you're quite artistic," I noted. "Your violin, that dance. Few I know do so much in arts."

"I suppose I am. Most angels take up something to augment their magic, a weapon, an instrument or some other object. I chose a violin. Music eventually made me learn to dance. They complement each other, you know." Ria looked at me, an unmistakable smile in her eyes.

"Combining the two helps with learning to maintain the rhythm."

"I see." I paused. "I couldn't see it that well because it's so dark, but I think your dance looked lovely."

Ria's eyes lit up even more. "Thank you!"

I could have sworn that the Harmony Blade hummed in approval.

"You know, we should probably sleep," Ria remarked. "At least I could use the sleep now."

"Yeah, me too," I replied.

Ria nodded, lay down and pulled her blanket over herself.

"Good night, Unar."

I lay down as well. "Good night, Ria."

I fell asleep, more at ease now.

Perhaps you can't judge a mage by their capabilities at hurtful magic after all.

The Road to Success

Currently uncollected

[Prose-ject 2020](#) day 6. Prompt used: *the road to success is lined with failures.*

My father used to say that the road to success is lined with failures. As a master swordsman, he lived by that motto and did his best to teach me to do so as well. After he died and I took up a sword to fight for my village, I have done my best to follow his teachings and his motto.

Although, I would be lying if I said that it had been easy, especially after recovering the Harmony Blade and having my first failures with its magic. The sword had a will of its own in a way, and it did not give its powers to the unworthy. Finding ways to prove myself to it had been the toughest part when I had had nothing to start from.

After meeting Ria and taking her with me from the mountaintop ruins, however, it seemed that I had done something right. The magic flowed easier, the movements felt smoother and the blade cut monsters deeper. Each time I made her feel welcome and valid, the sword approved my actions.

So far, what had made me more worthy of the blade had been neutralizing threats to others and helping people in need. The hurtful magic over the ruins Ria had conjured in her pain had dissipated by the time we had reached the nearby village, and people have been able to hike there again since. In a way, I had brought harmony to the world, albeit on a small scale.

I think I'm onto something. After all, the sword must have not been named "Harmony Blade" for no reason. There must a deeper meaning there.

My father was right. The road to success is lined with failures.

And I think I have found the right road.

Midsummer Lake

Currently uncollected

[Prose-ject 2020](#) day 17. Prompt: [Last Week of Summer](#) by [NessaJayn](#).

The Midsummer Lake — it was actually called Deepond, but I'd always called it Midsummer Lake — was right in front of my eyes once again. It had been years since I had last been here; it had been the last Midsummer my father had been alive, when I had been twelve. He had died in the following winter.

It was hard to believe it had been eight years since then, and even harder was to believe that it was a Midsummer again and I was here. Although, the very hardest thing that I had to believe now was that I was here not with a son or daughter of my own but... a companion of sorts. We had been traveling together for some weeks, but I still wasn't sure what to call her.

Ria had already gone ahead to enjoy the view. The sky was as clear as ever and the water even clearer than in my memories.

It was a lot to take in, being there again after so many years. My grandfather had offered to take me here after my father had died, but I had declined year after year until he, too, had passed away three years ago. After him, there had been no one left to even suggest going there, let alone carrying out a plan for it.

I think the first Midsummer without my father I swore that I'd never come here again because it hurt so much. Because it made me miss him so much more.

Yet here I was.

And my father's death hurt just as much as on the Midsummer seven years ago.

Before I realized it, I was on my knees, crying my soul out into my palms. I could feel Ria's hands on my shoulders and hear her voice, a concerned tone muffling out the wind, asking me what was wrong. I could not answer, not yet.

I wasn't sure if I could ever talk about it.

When I finally ran out of tears, I realized that she was hugging me.

"I don't know what came into you, but I'm here for you like you've been for me," she told. "Just ask and I'll help you in any way I can."

"Th-thank you..." I croaked and tried to clear my voice. Ria let go and looked into my eyes. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"I..." I looked away; I couldn't look at her. "I don't know." "It's ok," she said. Her voice was softer than I had heard ever before. "I understand."

I forced myself to look into her eyes. I had trusted her this far and she had not let me down. She had no reason to do so now either, right?

I decided to confide in her. "My father and I used to come here each Midsummer. I... haven't been here ever since he... he died. Not even though my grandfather offered to take me here each summer until he died too. It's been years but it still... it still hurts. It hurts so much."

"I see," Ria said. "So, that's why you didn't want to come here."

"Yeah."

"I'm sorry." Ria hugged me again. "Losing someone you love hurts, it always does. But the pain loses its sharpness only when it's faced and dealt with. I'm sure your father and grandfather are both proud of you. You've come a long way."

I nodded and hugged her back. I wanted to believe in her words. "Thank you."

That day, in the light of the sundown, I taught Ria stone skipping and fishing like my father had done with me. At the same time, she taught me a valuable thing: facing the pain of a loss did make the pain duller.

It was also a joy unlike any other to see her laugh and enjoy herself at the lake, a light in the darkening night that lessened the pain even more.

When I would have a child, I would brave the painful memories and pass on the tradition at the Midsummer Lake to them. That I knew for sure now.

Magic-augmented Items

Currently uncollected

[Prose-ject 2020](#) day 25. Prompt: *an unforgettable melody.*

The evening we spent at the Midsummer Lake, Ria took her violin out and explained how music-augmented magic worked: the instrument used for it was under normal circumstances a normal instrument. However, if specific melodies were played with an intention and a spell ready to be casted, it would turn into a weapon of magic and cast the spell with extra power and accuracy. Items like staves that were imbued with magic so that spells could be casted from them were similar, although they did not require melodies, merely understanding of how the item worked and the intention to cast a spell.

Ria told me that being able to use augmented items to cast spells took long training and the basic skill at casting spells normally, but otherwise it was actually quite easy. It did require more concentration than normal casting, but the increased power was worth it if the augmented item was strong enough.

I also learned that weapons that were augmented with magic to strengthen them often were not their normal versions when not in use; they were simply augmented weapons used by those who preferred to fight with weapons rather than spells. The Harmony Blade, which was a hybrid of them, was apparently an extreme rarity used only by the highest-ranking angels: while its main purpose was likely to be an augmented weapon, it still had the power to cast spells in case its wielder needed it and some sort of consciousness to aid in casting if necessary. She had no idea where the blade was from,

though, or who might have wielded it before it was put to rest at the forest I retrieved it from.

I had to admit that the Harmony Blade made more sense now; I had never studied magic, so whatever spells I had managed to cast had been successful only because the sword had wanted them to succeed. Since I didn't have the time to learn spellcasting enough to make much of a difference, I had to rely on the sword to do it for me when in need.

After she had finished talking, Ria started to play a melody she had learned long ago when she had learned to play the violin. I lay back and listened; it felt like the melody was etching itself into my mind at each note.

I had heard that angels were able to create and play unforgettable melodies, but only now I believed those words.

My ears did not lie, not this evening at the Midsummer Lake.

Ria's Limits

Currently uncollected

[Prose-ject 2020](#) day 19. Prompt: [Coven Zyra](#) by [Millalol](#).

Ever since we agreed to travel together, Ria used very little hurtful magic — at least when I was looking. I appreciated her choice to use mending magic instead whenever possible, although due its nature and her own inclination to use music and cunning instead of weapons and strengthening spells in combat she had to resort to hurtful spells whenever she had to do damage directly. After the first time, she explained that it was normal among angels who did not carry weapons or specialize in them.

A part of me, however, couldn't help wondering what her limits with hurtful magic were. It was clear that the only thing limiting her was herself, so I couldn't help wondering just how far she would go if pushed as far as possible.

One time, when she had made an unusually gross mess of some persistent ghouls who had ambushed us, I asked her about it. She only chuckled nervously and said that she had no idea. She added that she hoped that she would not find out either.

I hoped so too.

But as fate would have it, as my quest for mastering the Harmony Blade progressed, we found ourselves fighting against bigger and bigger monsters. This, in turn, forced Ria to use hurtful magic more and more both to protect herself and to cover me whenever I messed up.

Eventually, we got a largish city which was getting wrecked daily by a gargantuan beast called Harrower. We tracked it back into its lair and attempted to take it out by ambushing it.

The ambush failed. We had to face off Harrower at its sleeping chamber.

And Ria was pushed to the limits of her hurtful magic.

When I was about to get my head bitten off, a dark blast in front of Harrower's foremost legs tossed us apart. I landed on my back and turned to look at Ria as soon as I had recovered from the blow.

What I saw was a pale-blond-haired fallen angel in the air, black feathered hair jewelry framing the upper half of her face and a black and golden battle dress with wide black feather pauldrons on her. Her eyes were yellow orbs like the full moon a week ago. I didn't see any other angels around, so I could only think that it was Ria even though she looked so different.

"This ends now!" Ria announced, her voice deeper, darker and more confident than I'd ever heard from her. She spoke an incantation and shot a dark beam at Harrower's heart.

The beast let out a deafening scream and collapsed as its insides burst into the grossest mess I had seen so far. I turned on my side and gagged at the horrific smell, although I ended up not vomiting.

The clack of hard-soled boots approached me and I looked up. Ria was coming towards me. I took into the sight of her in this... whatever this form was: thigh-high boots, the battle dress and feather pauldrons, arm-length gloves ending with spikes on at the elbows and fabric covering her thighs and forearms. Her earrings and the jewel

holding her hair and feather hair jewelry together were golden, set with light orange stones that matched her cold eyes.

I was still as she approached. Her face betrayed no emotion whatsoever. I had no idea what was going on inside her head now.

In all honesty, in that moment I feared her. It felt like she might kill me now, something I had stopped fearing so long ago I had already forgotten the exact time frame.

This was the true power of a powerful fallen angel.

And I had no idea if it was with me or against me.

Gathering Feathers

Collected in [Hunting Inklings](#)

When he sat up after regaining consciousness, Unar stared at the destruction around himself. Then he had to lean over to his side to throw up when the smell registered in his brains. The avian beast he and Ria had been fighting against — and which had knocked him out — was in multiple large pieces, scattered around him.

Whatever had happened, it had not been pretty. When Unar believed that he could speak up, he called out, "Ria?"

No answer. "Ria?!"

Still no answer. "Anyone?!"

Nothing.

Unar shook from dehydration, but he stood up anyway. He had to find Ria — or whatever was left of her. A quick look around showed that the beast had most likely exploded either from the inside or from the skin in the middle of its torso.

Unar doubled over and gagged, but there was nothing for him to vomit anymore.

One of the separated wings ruffled. Unar turned to look at it, the Harmony Blade shaking in his shaking hand.

Ria surfaced from under it, dirtied but seemingly uninjured.

"Ria?" Unar gasped.

"You ok?" Ria shouted.

"I... I guess," Unar answered. He started to take shaky steps towards the fallen angel, trying not to slip. Ria flew to meet him with giant feathers in her hands.

"You don't look ok," she noted. "Here, take these. I'll get you something to drink."

Once she was free of the feathers, she flew off, leaving Unar standing with feathers in his hands. She returned with a flask and gave it to him while taking the feathers back. "Here, drink this."

"Thank you," Unar croaked and opened the flask to drink from it. The water was freezing, yet a blessing to his dehydrated body. "Why are you gathering feathers?"

"My clothes got a lot of damage during the fight, so I'm looking to fix and upgrade them. These feathers will do perfectly," Ria explained. "Sit down on a dry spot. I'll handle this."

A dry spot was the easiest to find outside of the circle the beast's remains created. Unar sat down on the grass and watched as his companion plucked feathers like a professional, checking and packing them up. He had no idea what she would actually do with them, but at that moment he did not care. He was merely grateful that he was still alive.

There was still hope for him to master the Harmony Blade and save his home village.

Black Dye

Collected in [Hunting Inklings](#)

I looked at Ria as she sorted through the feathers she had gathered from the avian beast after we — more like she had, as she had killed it while I'd been unconscious — had felled recently. She hadn't explained how she would exactly use them for her clothing. It also seemed that the clothes which had gotten damaged were the ones in her ultimate form, the form I'd seen only once before.

The memories of the damage she had done in that form made me shudder. If she ever decided to cross me, I was as good as dead.

"Okay, I think I've sorted through these," Ria suddenly shook me out of my thoughts. "It's only an aesthetic thing, but I want to dye these black before using them." "I didn't take you for someone who was good at textile work in addition to music," I remarked.

Ria shrugged. "I'm not, aside from the most basic skills that every angel is taught to ease survival in case of an emergency. I'm hoping that we'll find someone who is better than me in the next town. If not, I'll have to rely on my magic."

"Okay. What do you need for dyeing?" I asked.

"Inklings," Ria told. "I could use something else as well, but since you're still recovering and I'd rather not fight before I've got everything fixed, it might be better to try and catch them at night rather than go look for and kill any monsters that could do."

I didn't like the sound of that. "What about normal dye?"

"Whatever we could afford isn't going to last, especially not on feathers like these and in heavy magic use. Plus, I know little about plant-based dyeing, but I'm positive

there aren't any usable plants around here. Even if there was, there probably wouldn't be enough for my needs." Huh. That's too bad. "Very well. In that case, we'll hunt inklings."

Ria smiled. "Thank you."

Hunting Inklings

Collected in [Hunting Inklings](#)

When the night fell, we were ready. Ria had managed to conjure a net for us both so we could carry whatever we managed to catch back to our camp without having the inklings dissolve on the spot; it would have been far more difficult to try to catch them — or as many as of them as possible — straight into bottles.

As we crept further like predators, I started to hear chattering. Inklings! Ria and I exchanged a glance and started to circle around the snickering from different directions, nets ready. The more we managed to catch, the better.

It was tough to discern the inklings from the dark ground, but I saw them glimmer in the tiny shafts of moonlight which shone through the gaps in the leaves. I looked up to see Ria ready as well. I nodded to her. She nodded back.

We rushed at the inklings.

The snickering turned into high-pitched shrieks as we swung our nets at the inklings. Many got away, but we managed to secure a few. There was nothing to silence them, though, so we had bear with it all the way back to the camp.

Once we got back, I observed the inklings we had caught. I had seen an inkling up close only once before; I had been six when my father had taken me to see them at the forest near our village. I had managed to catch one into my hands only for it to make an explosive dissolution

right at my face the moment I had touched it. The ink had stung in my eyes for hours after that.

As Ria prepared the ink bottles, I spoke up, "My father used to say that inklings are merely ink animated by a spell without an end parameter other than being touched, not actually living creatures. Is that true?"

"It is, as far as I know," Ria told. "Why do you ask?"

"I was just curious. It always felt a bit strange since they seem so... sentient." I gestured at the captured inklings as they chattered in audible horror.

"Back in the City," Ria pointed at the stars above us, "they say that a mage once animated his ink for safer transportation when he changed residency, but he made a sloppy work with the spell, most notably not making an end parameter that would trigger anyway. The only end parameter was a living being touching them. Some of those inklings escaped mid-transit and, as sloppily animated things left to their own devices tend to do sooner or later, started to duplicate in the wild. It escalated to the point he could not stop them, so he gave up and reported the matter to the nearest sorcery school. That school eventually gave up on their inkling hunt as well and instead started to research them." She smirked. "In the end, that school got a source of infinite ink from them, renamed itself 'Inky Academy' and started to sell their inkling ink for extra money. Eventually, they started to gain so much money from the ink that they could gradually lower their tuition fees into oblivion without cutting from anything."

"Inky Academy?" I had heard the name before. "So, it's not just a myth that they sell actual inkling ink?"

"Not as far as I know," Ria told. Her smirk softened into a smile. "We could always visit it and see for ourselves. I may be a fallen angel, but I'm still an angel. I'm sure that they won't pass up a chance to interact with one." She turned to look at the inklings. "However, first things first. Could you help me with the inklings? We probably have to

make multiple hunts, but I don't want to lose any more drops than necessary."

"Of course, as long as none of them explode on my face."
Ria laughed softly. "If any of them does, I'll get the ink off, don't worry."

I gave her a lopsided smile and braced myself to meet the horrific memories from that one night in my childhood.

"Let's get to it, then."

Inky Travelers

Currently uncollected

Prompt: *Sunrise*

By sunrise, Ria and I had gotten a decent amount of ink for her to use. I did have ink on my face but luckily none in my eyes — not that it eased reliving my childhood trauma — so it was safe to say that it had gone fine. "Well, that should do it for a while. We might have to come back to get some more, depending on what the sewer says." Ria put the last bottles into her bag. "Do you feel like walking or do you want to get some sleep first?" The prospect of sleep did sound tempting, but I knew I'd prefer sleeping without any ink on. I put a smirk on my face to ease my companion's worries. "Let's go. I can sleep once we reach the town." Ria smiled back. "I saw a trail nearby. Follow me."

I followed her, once again wondering how I'd learned to trust a fallen angel.

Sense of Pride

Currently uncollected

I had seen postcards sent from Inky Academy — the cousin of a child in my village worked there and that child loved flaunting it — but those pieces of paper could not capture its beauty.

"Impressed?" Ria asked. I nodded. She grinned. "This is nothing compared to the City."

"I can believe that," I remarked. Ria did not flaunt her home but even after being cast out of there she did have a bit of a sense of pride about where she came from.

Well, we all did in these parts. Maybe it was just natural.

Two People

Currently uncollected

"Have you ever heard that when united two people who mix together well form something great?"

I had not, back then.

"Well, Unar, perhaps someday you will meet such people. They might be a duo of strangers, they might be people you know, or perhaps you will meet someone who will form something great with you."

I recalled the elder's words one day when I looked at Ria. I had left on my journey alone, thinking I'd do everything on my own, but then I had met her along the way. We had formed a good team. No, a great team.

"If you do meet someone like that, take good care of them."

Back then, I promised that I would.

I was also going to keep that promise no matter what.

A Break at a Lake

Currently uncollected

[Prose-ject 2020](#) day 28. Prompt: [Daybreak at the lake](#) by [HGTreescapescapes](#).

After some rough battles while trying to get on the other side, we were able to stop at a cabin by the lake at the foot of the mountains we had just come from. Its owner let us in even though she eyed us in suspicion — not that I blamed her; a fallen angel and a normal-looking guy with an unusual sword were a strange sight even when they were not riddled with injuries and looking like they both might have some broken bones. Heck, a normal angel was strange enough to see around here!

After Ria and I got to sit on the wooden floor, she lay down and grimaced.

"How badly are you injured?" I asked her.

"That Hammertail managed to break some ribs," Ria breathed. "It hurts like hell, but I can't keep the painkiller spell active anymore."

"What about your leg?" I asked.

"It's better since you could put dressings on it," Ria told. She gave a weak laugh. "I'm more worried about my leggings. I *hate* sewing even when my palms aren't trying to make new skin to make up for the layer I lost out there. Not to mention that blood is tough to wash away from them after it has dried." She took a deep breath. "Y'know, those dipshit ambushers slashed you pretty bad. You ok?" "Your healing spells were enough. Don't worry, I'm fine aside from breaking my arm while fighting the Hammertail," I told.

"Good," Ria breathed. "If you don't mind, I'll take a nap and recover a little. I'll try to heal more once I've rested."

"I don't," I noted and looked at the cabin's owner.

"I don't mind either. Take your time," she said. "It appears you have had a tough time."

"You're correct about that, ma'am," I said. Ria had already fallen asleep, so I decided to take care of the introductions. "By the way, I'm Unar. My companion here is Ria."

"I am Heide," the cabin owner told.

"Pleasure to meet you." I bowed my head.

Heide nodded to me. "Do you need anything?"

"I don't think I do," I said. "We managed to patch our wounds up before coming here. The rest is up to nature and Ria's healing spells."

"Very well," Heide said. "I will be in the kitchen if you need me."

"Thank you," I thanked.

Heide went to another room, although not without sparing a glance at me before that. I took a deep breath and relaxed. I didn't want to sleep yet in case of an emergency, but a meditative break would not hurt as long as I stayed conscious of my surroundings. The monk Amadeo had taught me that and much more in my search for understanding of the Harmony Blade.

Pondering for the End

Currently uncollected (previously completely unreleased)

This was written for Flash Fiction Month's Discord's word war on the chat event of the 28th of June, 2020 (sprint 1: 15 minutes). There was a prompt (*a forest made of objects that aren't trees*), but I left it unused.

Total wordcount: 630 (42 wpm), which earned me the first place.

We looked at the forest around ourselves. It had been a tough trek this far. I was starting to understand why the beast, Skyhawk, had not been felled. It was simply too far from the village for its hunters to hunt it down. They would run out of energy long before they would reach its lair.

Luckily, we were no ordinary hunters at this point. The Harmony Blade had become relatively close to me and Ria, despite of her non-combat inclinations, was already used to treks like this just like me.

All of our training was finally paying off. Soon, I would be strong enough to take on the ghoulish that still harassed my village, as far as I had heard from messengers, merchants and travelers coming from there.

I did not know if I wanted Ria to come with me to that fight, though. I had not thought about it since I had been so concentrated on training and getting ready for it.

I had to admit to myself that I had become a little reliant on her help, really, and at this point I did not know if I could just tell her to stand back after everything we had been through together as a team.

Maybe I should bring it up after we've dealt with Skyhawk and returned whatever animals that were still alive after being captured by the beast.

Yes, I should probably bring it up sooner rather than later.

Anyway, we kept on with our trek. We would have to pause to gather our strength before attacking, but so far things were going well. Just one more hour and we would be close and could plan our approach once we would see the area.

Nevertheless, the thoughts about the ghoul and fighting against it bothered me as we climbed further. Should I already try my luck here?

No, not after climbing here *with* Ria. Besides, I would need her flying skills and magic against this opponent: the ghoul could not fly, but Skyhawk could. I wouldn't stand a chance against it alone unless I learned to fly myself.

I made the decision of discussing the matter with Ria after this case was over. Maybe then I would also know better what I wanted: did I want to be known as the man who felled the ghoul on his own, or did I want everyone to tell that the ghoul was bested by a team of the man who wielded the Harmony Blade and a fallen angel?

Back when I set out to my journey, I would have definitely wanted the former and perhaps even disregarded what Ria would have wanted. Now, however? I did not know. Ria and I had traveled and grown together for months and we had become a good team. No, we had become an *excellent* team. We could both count on the other to have our back and that the other would not abandon us or leave us for dead.

Teaming up with someone stronger than me might not be as glorious, but wouldn't it be for the best that we get the job done, others' opinions be damned? Weren't the innocent whom the ghoul hurt more important than my own glory?

I wish I knew what my father would have done in a situation like this. It would have helped me a great deal.

Well, I'll discuss it with Ria. Her opinion matters to me nevertheless, and I had to take it into account no matter what would happen.

Yes, indeed. That would be for the best. Perhaps she can offer a solution or some insight to the matter, something that will solve the matter altogether.

We'll see when it's the time for talking.

Now, it's the time for hunting.

Unexpectedly Bad Reactions

Currently uncollected (previously completely unreleased)

This was written for Flash Fiction Month's Discord's word war on the chat event of the 28th of June, 2020 (sprint 2, 15 minutes).

Wordcount: 681 (45 wpm), which earned me the first place.

When I had decided to discuss facing the ghoul with Ria, I had not expected what would happen.

She was angry at me for even considering going alone after all the battles we had fought together. She did try to calm down, and I could see the effort, but she made it clear that she was hurt that I had even considered casting her aside the moment she was on the way of his glory.

To be honest, when she said it aloud, I realized in its entirety how stupid I had been thinking that way. Of course it did not matter what others thought; what we did was what mattered, nothing else.

The Harmony Blade dimmed a little after that incident. While it was still powerful and did what I needed, I could see and feel how it had gotten weaker from it.

Unfortunately, my attempts at fixing things had not worked. Ria was still hurt, although she did her best to keep working with me like before. I guess she felt betrayed, though, because even though you could not see any differences in her actions, I could see it in her eyes and the way she used hurtful magic.

It was concerning, but I hoped that after we would work it out somehow, things would turn out fine again and we could go and face the ghoul together.

The fate did not agree with me, however, because one day, a messenger from the ghoul came to me and delivered a challenge. It would hurt my little stepsister *and* my mother if I did not face it between the next full moon and the one after it.

Since the full moon was close, I had no time to train any further. We set forth back to my home village; Ria, having heard the challenge, understood my urgency and did not bring our issues up as we traveled.

I did hope that after all this was over, she could forgive me when I would apologize for my inconsideration again.

At the village, things went worse, however. Ria was met with horrified gasps, vile looks and malevolent whispers. I could hear some older women call her a succubus. Whether Ria heard it or not, I don't know. I hope that she did not, but I think she did.

Nevertheless, meeting my family did not go any better at all. My stepsister screamed, fearing that Ria was the ghoul's minion, my mother reacted to her fear and my stepfather might have tried to attack her, had I not stepped in between them and tried to explain.

It was a disaster, one that made us get out of the village and camp there to make a plan.

While I tried to retain my calmness and think rationally, I couldn't help but think of what my mother had said, "Your father would be ashamed of you for falling under a fallen angel's influence!"

I know that she did not mean anything bad. She was only acting out of fear and ignorance but... I just couldn't shake the feeling that we wouldn't go into history as heroes if we worked together.

The moon was already over half at that point. I did not have much time anymore.

After I had assured Ria that I'd figure something out, that things wouldn't go bad because of my village... I made my choice.

Ria's involvement in this was only causing chaos. I could already feel the Harmony Blade weaken from it. I had to deal with this case myself, on my own, and hope that I was strong enough of a swordsman to defeat the ghoul on my own.

I had not fought alone much ever since meeting Ria, but I had to hope that my skills were enough.

In the dead of the cloudless night, when Ria was sleeping under the moonlight, I sneaked away from our camp towards the clearing the ghoul had made its lair at.

I had to defeat it once and for all or else our journey — my journey — would have been for nothing.

The Journey's End

Currently uncollected

[Prose-ject 2020](#) day 30. The prompts: *the brilliance of a sunset*, "Live long, and prosper." -Star Trek (quote), [we may not be that complicated](#) by [alapip](#) (literature), [Don't go, don't go](#) by [Dyemelikeasunset](#) (image).

At first, my blade-to-blade battle with the ghouel went well. We were evenly matched, with the ghouel having become slightly rusty with no challengers while I had honed myself for months. When it came to magic, I was having more trouble, but the Harmony Blade kept me safe.

Unfortunately, we were too evenly matched. I slowly started to run out of endurance and, under moonlight just like the one under which I had first seen Ria dance, I started to miss her.

I had been reliant on her mending spells to keep me going even when I was starting to run out of strength to continue.

I reminisced those spells and used them to coax the Harmony Blade to help me keep my footing. It did, inspired by my determination to defeat the ghouel, give me some strength. I continued the fight, refreshed and grateful.

The first time I lost my footing, I resorted to magic to blast the ghouel away. That blast, bright as it was, looked like the brilliant sunset at Midsummer Lake. I couldn't help thinking about all the melodies Ria had created, some of which she said were inspired by our experiences at that

very lake, the brilliance of the sunset and the happy memories we made under it.

I missed her already. I had wronged her twice about this battle. I could only hope that she would forgive me in the end.

If she did not, I wasn't sure what I'd do. She had become my dearest friend, perhaps the true definition of a "best friend", and I loved her as such even though we had never romantically clicked together.

I got back up on my feet and returned to the battle, reminiscing all the training my father had given me before his death.

I would become a hero like him tonight and live to tell the tale.

Yet as the battle dragged on, I started to lose my focus as fatigue set in. My spells slowly became sloppier, more undirected and more ineffective. Ria had supported me with her spells so that I could concentrate only on fighting instead of following my own energy levels as well, and she had covered for me whenever I had had to take a break to either recover or heal.

This was a mistake. I had been too rash, too occupied with what everyone else thought. Too proud and ambitious as well.

I should've come here with Ria.

Oh Ria... please forgive me for being such an idiot.

I had to end the battle soon, but the ghoul was too skilled and lacked all signs of fatigue. I was going to die at this rate, but I couldn't run away to get backup or call for Ria.

Even if she would come, she couldn't hear me from this far, and the ghoul wouldn't let me leave the clearing alive.

I had to figure something out quickly or else I would go into history as a fool who went under a fallen angel's influence, escaped and got killed, dooming my home village to be under the ghoul's terrible reign for who knows how long.

When I went for a desperate lunge, the ghoul suddenly blasted me against a rock. I think I felt something snap in my back upon impact, but I definitely felt the rock shatter behind my back before I landed on sharp rubble, gasping in sudden agony. I could no longer move my legs. Pushing myself up with the free hand despite of the rubble digging into my palm, I raised the Harmony Blade to defend myself. The ghoul smacked it away with its own sword, making me lose balance and fall on my back again. This time, I screamed when the rubble set itself back into my flesh into new spots.

Once the worst of the pain disappeared, I looked at the sky and tried to move my legs. Nothing. I was helpless. The ghoul came to my view and pointed its sword at me.

I looked at the stars behind its head. Ria and I had talked about going to them to meet her old angel friends once this journey would be over so that she could try to make amends and make the others see that being a fallen one wasn't necessarily a bad thing. Only what you did after you fell mattered, and she had used her new powers well. I knew that she missed her home and friends.

The stars twinkled at me. I wanted to reach them, but I knew that it was far too late for that. The blade was against my throat. I had lost.

I had lost.

"Unar, no!" a familiar voice screamed. A dark blast tossed the ghoul away. Someone landed near me.

Ria came into my view. "Unar! What did you do?"
"Ria..." I gasped. "Ria, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry." I wanted to offer some kind of explanation, so I did when I still could. "I was stupid. I minded their opinions too much. It was a mistake. I... I'm so sorry. Please forgive me."
"Don't go and die just yet," Ria said. She was changing her form, although not before pushing some healing magic into me. "I'll be right back."

She disappeared from my view. I heard the Harmony Blade getting picked up.

"You will pay for what you did to my friend!" Ria proclaimed with her fallen angel voice.

The ghoul laughed. "Really? A fallen angel saves the 'hero'? Please, do your worst. You can't kill me."

I heard Ria say under her breath. Then her footsteps ran towards the ghoul. Swords clashed together once. Twice. Thrice.

Ria screamed. The ghoul laughed. Had I had the strength, I would've cried out for her.

Then the ghoul let out a gurgle. I heard a thump. Footsteps hurried back to me.

The stars were still twinkling at me, although they were starting to become blurry. I was starting to lose my consciousness.

Ria came to my view again.

"No, no, no, don't go, don't go," she said. She took me to her arms and started to speak healing incantations —

something she did only when she was desperate. I coughed blood.

"Don't go. I don't want you to die, not yet," Ria said. There were tears coming down her face.

"Ria..." I gasped.

"Don't speak. I'll heal you, trust me. You'll live. Just hold on!"

"Ria, no... It's too late. I messed up... I messed up everything..."

"We can talk about it when you're no longer bleeding out."

"No, Ria... It's too late." I reached out with my bloodied hand and found her tear-stained cheek. "Ria, I'm so sorry for failing you. For thinking that I could do it alone when I always needed you. For thinking that both parts of the team could work alone. I'm sorry... I'm so sorry it had to end like this."

"This isn't the time for goodbyes!" Ria told and pushed more of her healing magic into my wounds. "You're not dying, got that?!"

"Ria..." I knew I was fading away, so I had to give my goodbyes now. I knew that she would never forgive me.

"Live long... and prosper."

This wasn't the end I wanted, but it was the end I got. Our journey... was at its end.

I faded away while Ria screamed, "*UNAR, NO!*"

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