

Write Away the Fog



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The Quill & Anger

Written by

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“W

e will always have dreams. Astiryan, promise me you won't stop dreaming.”

Wita's eyes were pleading. Hoping. He felt heavy numbness settle in his limbs again. He wanted to refuse her pleas but couldn't form words. He couldn't move a single cell in his body. He struggled. And woke up.

He dreamt of Wita's departure again. It was a memory dream. A memory he has been reliving in his dreams since he helped her leave. Guilt settled in the pit of his stomach again. Followed by bone-deep sadness. And despair. Then anger.

Astiryan left his cottage on the edge of a Skyburgh cliff and blinked when the sun hit him. He was alone as always. But here he could at least breathe. And sleep. He couldn't do that in Oldale or Gulbrook or Landbridge or any other magical places. They were infested with magic. The air hummed with energy of spells and rituals. And he hated that with such ferocious conviction he could feel his own magical power gurgle inside him every time he set foot in one of those towns. Being here alone hurt no one and it made the pain slightly more bearable. He had never believed stories of undying love and broken heart that he had been privileged to read in the past. That was before Wita vanished.

They wouldn't let him near the Agrippa Library now. The current Writer and Librarian Cornelius Agrippa felt old books of inexplicable origin containing stories of imaginary worlds would mess up young Astiryan's mind. They might give him ideas. And even more questions nobody wanted to hear. Astiryan was sure a few of the Eolds and the Wise had answers, probably even Corenlius himself, but nobody would talk about it. Except Leodwita. The old archive keeper and story-teller was the only one that even resembled a friend and visited him regularly.

Astiryan collapsed on an old bench in front of the cottage trying to enjoy the view of the sandy beach and the azure sea. He almost relaxed when his gaze drifted further out and focused on the Hield – the final barrier. It was literally a wall of fog so thick not even eyesight enhancing spells could penetrate it. There has not been a single witch, sorcerer, warlock or mage that has ever seen what was beyond it. Not even those originating from the most powerful magical families like the Goedls, Manvoisins or Cowleys possessed such power. Apparently because there was nothing to see. The Hield was supposed to be a protection barrier shielding the world from chaos and nothingness. Everyone else but Astiryan and Wita seemed to accept the explanation as a fact. Others before them who had their doubts and tried to pass through the Hield could no longer speak. They were all dead. Anytime there had been an attempt to breach the final frontier a micro storm appeared on the sea and they were all tragically sucked into the whirlpool and washed ashore. Except Wita. Her body was never found.

Astiryan still believed it was because she made it. And if she did that meant the Hield was not the end of the world but rather something else. He could not quite form what exactly could lie beyond but he knew it was something else than nothingness and chaos. Besides, the idea of nothingness went against every magic law there was. One simply could not conceive nothing, create nothing or transform anything that was into something that was not. It is also what Wita told him in his dreams when they connected. They were only short flashes of her face, sometimes only snippets of broken sentences or even just a humming of her energy but it was enough to keep Astiryan's fragile hope alive. It was also frustrating she hadn't appeared in his dreams for a while.

He closed his eyes, letting the warm sea breeze soothe his skin and tried to clear his mind. He wished for sleep so relaxed and deep as it used to be when Wita was still a part of the world. Sleeping was a time they had both been looking forward to. It was their chance to meet, to talk, to touch even. Because Wita was a dreamweaver. It was a rare form of magic that was not exactly forbidden but definitely frowned upon. And yet Wita treasured it, practised it and passed that knowledge on to a few others. She claimed it was something her parents wanted her to do before they were found dead on the shore after a storm that prevented them breaking through the Hield. She was an only child and that made her the last of the Laveau clan – once powerful voodoo practitioners, mind readers and dreamweavers. Astiryan almost smiled when he thought how dreamweaving didn't die with her disappearance as Eolds no doubt hoped it would. He may have been a Southeil – a summoner – but made sure he mastered the art of dreamweaving. A few others did too but he had no idea whether they still did it. They probably did since it was a popular way of communication and other forbidden pleasures the young felt the need for at night. Secret lovers and friends could meet in a dream and fulfil their fantasies which would otherwise get them into trouble with their parents or the Eolds. That is why Astryan and Wita started doing it in the first place. And then after her parents died and she desperately wanted to cross the Hield they used dreamweaving to have secret meetings to plan and plot her departure. It was the only way they would not be eavesdropped upon and no evidence of their blasphemous thoughts, theories and plans were left behind.

They were the best times of Astryan's life. Until they weren't. After she had left Eardgeard dreamweaving became erratic, uncontrollable, difficult and frustrating. He tried finding her in the dreamworld every chance he had but she has only appeared a few times. It was as if though the connection was broken or disturbed somehow. Even when they made contact he could never make out the place, the surroundings, he could never see and feel the whole of her. Sometimes he was so desperate he almost used the Quill to bring her back. He never did. He promised he would never force her come back and it was one of the very rare promises he intended to keep. That, however, hasn't stopped him from wanting to join her wherever she was. The only problem was he couldn't find a way. Becoming an outcast had its advantages like peace and quiet but it also meant he was no longer allowed to dig through old books and records, had no way to have his questions answered or even people to ask.

Leodwita probably indulged his curiosity from time to time only because the old man was still hoping Astiryian would get over the loss of his lover and best friend and would one day return to the Blake Archives and continue his training as a story-teller. Little did Leodwita know that Astryan never stopped practising the skills.



“Ast … Ast, wake up! Please …” Astryan’s eyes fluttered open and he saw her. She was standing in front of him, her long fair hair fluttering in the wind, her feet bare on the lime green grass, her lean and lithe body dressed in green as always leaning against a broad trunk of an oak tree. He smiled for the first time in ages. “Wita, it’s you. It’s really you. You’re alive …” Her soft tinkling laughter was like a soothing poultice over his cold and aching heart. “Yes, Ast, I’m alive. It has taken me a long time to figure this world out. But now I know how to reach you. But we don’t have much time. I can only borrow the oak’s ebergy for so long.” Astryan felt his body alive with excitement, energy, happiness: “But …” She interrupted, now speaking faster: “Just listen, please. Eadgeard is not the world. It’s a part of the world, a very small part. The rest is what is beyond the Hield. But no one from the rest of the world knows about that because the fog shieldfs and hides Eardgard. So it’s impossible to find it or get there.” Astryan tried to focus and though the words registered in his brain and were even logical he couldn’t quite grasp the concept. “So you can’t come back.” He said it as a fact, not a question. After a quick thought he added: “I couldn’t even write you back?” Wita came closer and almost touched his hand. He could feel the vibrating energy along his palm but not the actual touch. He would do anything to be able to really touch her again. Wita looked into his eyes, her expression serious and yet completely calm: “No, you can’t write me back. But …” Suddenly he felt his body being shaken and he jumped up at the sound of someone calling his name. Not yet fully awake he saw Leodwita looming over him. The image of Wita was gone. He realized he had been sleeping. They had been dreamweaving. Again. Even though he was frustrated and angry with Leodwita for interrupting the dream he smiled at him. It seemed that surprised the old man to no end. He only stared at him.

Astryan, however, feeling no anger or sadness, just pure energy coursing through his body, started talking. It took Leodwita a while to go over the shock of seeing his former charge changed so suddenly but if he had any ideas or theories as to why that was he kept them to himself. He forced himself to patiently listen to the young man’s rapid and enthusiastic words. He stopped him only when Astryan mentioned the Quill. Everyone in Eadgeard knew about the Forbidden Quill. It was one of the most powerful magical objects in Eadgeard. It was hidden deep in the vaults of the Agrippa library along with a few other, similarly or even more dangerous items. The Quill had the power to make a story written with it come true. It was also believed that none of the mages possessed the magic to use it anymore but the Eolds locked it in a vault anyway. Or so they thought.

The Quill was instrumental in enabling Wita cross the Hield and Astiryan had stolen it from the Library's vault in order to write with it a story of Wita's departure. Considering their dreamweaving from a few minutes ago, he was successful. Until then he thought he would never touch the damned object again but now it seemed more and more appealing to use the forbidden dark magic again to join the love of his life. And leave Eardgeard forever.

His thoughts were quickly turning into a hectic mass resembling a tornado. He was trying to understand too many things at once. Not to mention Leodwita was now staring at him, a worried frown on his face. He had to be more careful. If anyone thought Astiryan had the Quill and the power to use it, he would not only be punished by burning at the stake but would surely never see Wita again. He quickly masked the mention of the Quill with more rambling about the archives and story-telling and basically asked Leodwita if he could go back to training. The old man seemed surprised and even happy at the thought but there was still suspicion etched into his face when he commented: "It must've been quite a dream for you to go back to the old self so suddenly." Astiryan centred himself and forced calm into his voice: "I can't go on like this. I need to do something." The words were honest. He meant them. Leodwita nodded: "Fine. I'll talk to Cornelius and the Wise." After Astiryan thanked him, he started slowly descending the stairs leading from the cliff to the valley behind it. On the top of the stairs the old man half turned around and said: "Astiryan, be careful with dreamweaving. Sometimes it becomes difficult to distinguish dreams from memories."

Astiryan barely gave it a thought. He needed to think. But the more he tried to make sense of Wita's words the more his mind was buzzing with confusion. After a while he couldn't even recall her exact words anymore. His mind was tired. It felt blank. Frustrated and angry again he made himself a sleeping potion and crawled into bed. He knew that sleeping potions could affect dreams and especially dreamweaving in weird ways but he needed to try. He needed Wita to tell him what to do. He'd do anything to see her again. He fell into a deep slumber.

He woke up. Again. For the twelfth time in as many nights without reaching Wita. Their dreamweaving was broken again and it didn't matter when he slept, whether he used one of his increasingly potent potions or not. She was lost to him again. Awareness that she was alive kept him going but barely. Not even the perfect summer weather cheered him up. Even the news that he could go back to training as a story-teller meant nothing to him.



When summer storms started and an old warlock was found dead at sea, Astiryan's last remains of hope died. The warlock's death was labelled as a tragic accident, of course – they all were – but deep down he now knew that the warlock had surely tried to cross the Hield and was killed by a magical micro storm. He didn't even care who watched over them and made sure they never left. It was probably the Eolds. Or perhaps the warrior clan of Liands. It didn't matter.

He didn't discuss it with anyone, didn't ask any annoying questions, didn't try to stir doubts with his friends as he would have done in the past. He only knew he wanted out. He would find Wita and would never return to this oppressive world. For he now understood what Wita was trying to tell him – Eardgeard was only a part of the much bigger world. It was hidden from everything and everyone else because the dense magical fog of the Hield was hiding it. Just as it was hiding Eardgeard and all its magic population from the rest of the world. He even had an idea why. A lot of the old stories and poems as well as many forbidden texts in the archives now made sense. According to those several witches and wizards were forced to leave the old world or they would be burnt at stake for practising magic. They found a part of the world, mostly referred to as Ealniwe leg or the New Island, and made it their new home. A new world. Many different magical people from different parts of the world escaped to the island until the Eolds – the rulling body of the New Island – closed it and erased it from the world by creating the Hield – meaning guard, protection in the old language. They also renamed the island Eardgeard – ancient work. From then on every child born on the island was taught this was the world and beyond the Hield there was nothing. It was also made sure by careful weather magic that the seasons and the weather were predictable and perfect. The whole community was magic perfection. Except the micro storms that magically appeared anytime someone tried to cross the Hield.

Astryan knew that now with perfect clarity but he was beyond having an opinion. He had no desire to either understand the Eold's actions or change them. He only wanted to leave. Unfortunately and to his immense frustration, however, the Quill failed him. It worked and responded nicely to his power but there were certain stories that would simply not materialize. He tried rewriting his crossing the Hield countless times, in every possible form imaginable with no success. The Quill made everything else come true, though. He tested it numerous times and he even went so far as to change rain to hail. It worked. It also taught him a lesson though. Quill-written stories that were too unusual drew attention and since the Quill was such a powerful object that it emanated almost visible magical vibrations he would have to be careful.

After another storm and dreamless night he decided to do the unthinkable. He would write a monster and use his summoning power to bring it forth and increase its power. A monster so ferocious it would swallow Eardgeard. Months of loneliness, anger, sadness, pain and frustration combined with years of lies and pointless rules to maintain the lies and the hidden world finally boiled over and he devised a perfect story. He weaved an extraordinary summoning spell into it and without giving Eardgeard or its people another thought he read it out loud. As soon as he was finished he took the Quill and floated away from the coast on a make-shift raft, careful not to go too far away from the coast and not too close to the Hield.

As soon as he heard deafening thunder and saw a black mass shooting fire bolts descending from the sky all air was squeezed out of his lungs. He felt a searing pain on his back and thought perhaps a fire meteor had hit him.
Then all was black



When he regained consciousness he was still at sea but very close to the shore. He walked to the beach below Skyburgh cliff only to see there was no cliff anymore. Flat, desolate black stretch of land went as far as the eye could see. There were no towns, no dwellings, no people. There was nothing but the land. He slowly turned around towards where the Hield had always been. It was there no more. There was no fog shield. Instead green-blue sea opened up and on the edge of the horizon he could barely see something. Perhaps another island? It didn't matter what. It was clearly The World. The one where he would find Wita.

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ABOUT
GALINA MARX GARIN



Galina Marx Garin is a philosopher-poet in combat boots, armed with a pen, a playlist full of metal, and a suspicious amount of caffeine.

She writes steamy, smart, and slightly unhinged stories about beautiful disasters who fall in love (sometimes accidentally, often loudly). When she's not plotting emotional chaos on the page, she's mentoring improv misfits, learning Arabic, or sparring with corporate nonsense and a left hook.

Want more lust, laughs, and literary rebellion?

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