

A continuation into the stories pertaining to Those With Virtue with Violet Diamond and others she holds dear.

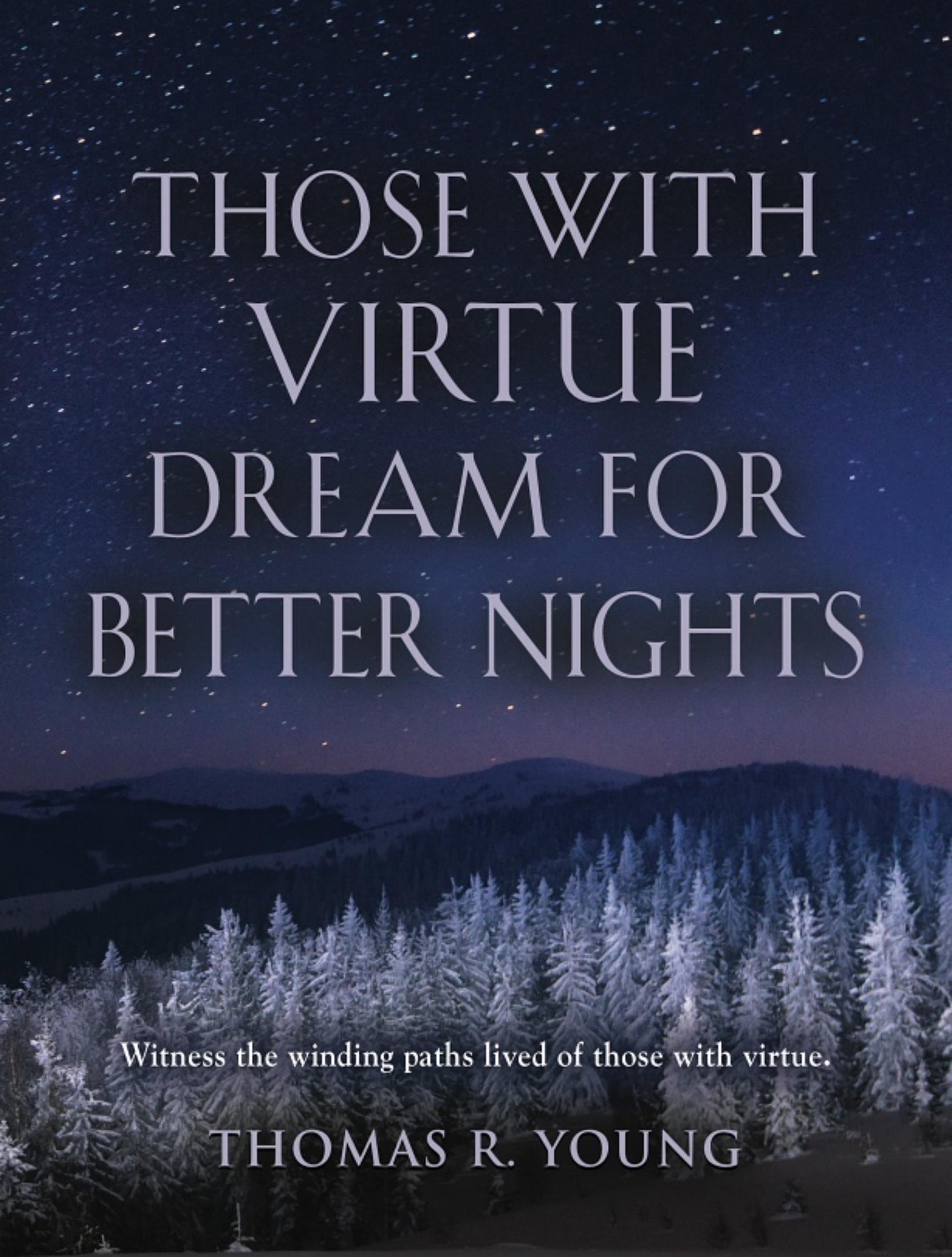
Those With Virtue Dream For Better Nights

By Thomas R. Young

Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/13144.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**



THOSE WITH
VIRTUE
DREAM FOR
BETTER NIGHTS

Witness the winding paths lived of those with virtue.

THOMAS R. YOUNG

Copyright © 2023 Thomas R. Young

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-958890-79-0

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-958890-80-6

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88531-578-4

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

Printed on acid-free paper.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2023

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

Young, Thomas R.

Those With Virtue Dream For Better Nights by Thomas R. Young

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023916865

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Prologue..... | 7 |
| Chapter 1: The True Lihara | 9 |
| Chapter 2: Mother Springs | 46 |
| Chapter 3: Love and Loss..... | 79 |
| Chapter 4: Validated By Others' Opinions | 105 |
| Chapter 5: House of Mirrors..... | 140 |
| Chapter 6: Heart On A Vine..... | 183 |
| Chapter 7: Feast of Souls..... | 206 |
| Chapter 8: The Devil You Know..... | 277 |
| Chapter 9: Original Sin..... | 323 |
| Chapter 10: All Too Familiar | 377 |
| Chapter 11: A Mutilated Past | 457 |
| Chapter 12: Impossible Dream..... | 502 |
| Chapter 13: Brand New World..... | 589 |

Chapter 1: The True Lihara

Violet made sure Lunio had a nice tailored pillow and blanket while he slept at the foot of the bed at the time she went to her training sessions. This time the tailor met up with Samael for her practice.

"Hello, dear," Samael, the tall celestial dragon spoke with arms folded, towering over the tailor as she entered the training room with vaulted ceilings. "Come for more lessons, yeah?"

"Greetings, Samael," Violet performed a slight bow to show respect. "I am indeed here to continue the training regimen."

Samael stared at the tailor for a long while then spoke. "Strange to be alive again. With how much has changed, I feel a bit out of touch. A bit out of place. To be cursed and rotting among the livestock was to be my foray. My lot in everlasting life given by a sister most rotten, herself. And now, livestock wishes me to train it. Whether I can accept the gift of life's direction in this manner or not, the effectual outcome of being not of this realm is unnerving."

"It's going to take a while to adjust, darling. But don't fret too much. I'm just hoping to stop the Eternal Dream so that your time to adjust is...longer," Violet smiled at the hellish dragon. "If I can't stop it, then there'd be no more time to do that adjusting."

Samael stared for a long while more at the tailor with golden amber eyes, then slowly unfolded his arms. "I'd like that. Now, let's continue our lesson. To satisfy that hungry mind of yours."

"I'm ready," Violet nodded confidently.

Samael brought both clawed hands together as well as his tail to charge up a sphere of light, crackling with energy. The room's lights, themselves, began to flicker. "Light has always been the element I was most in touch with. The burns from light can match that of hellish fire any day. If one knows how to use it appropriately."

"Not dark magic?" Violet asked curiously, looking at the sphere of light.

"Dark magic is beyond me, I'm afraid. I think my sister was into it, though. Probably how she learned to curse others so effectively," Samael remarked as he lowered both clawed hands and held the crackling sphere of light with his tail's tip. "I was known as a wanderer. Traveled the mortal and hellish lands, living wild and free. To me, mortal livestock should oversee its own kingdom. Not have some fancy lizards tell them what to do or say. Of course, I helped those who asked on my travels, if their reasoning was sound. Using my light for healing and a bit of protection, I made it so. Or burn what is in opposition."

"I entirely understand, darling," Violet softly smiled. "Did you want me to recreate the sphere of light or something?"

Samael nodded lightly as he lowered his tail for Violet to hold the sphere of light. "Take hold."

Violet blushed, moving to hold Samael's tail. "Um...like this?"

The celestial dragon watched the tailor grab his tail. "I kinda meant the sphere, but this is fine as well."

"Sorry, sorry," Violet blushed, moving to grab the sphere of light.

Samael chuckled lightly as he released the sphere into Violet's hands. The ball was warm in her hands and almost felt like it wasn't there despite the immense power behind the crackling energy. "This light is a spell made for protecting the ones you love. Whether that be to heal or to punish an aggressor. By the by, you have soft hands. A gentle touch."

"It's awfully warm..." Violet looked over the sphere of light with interest, blushing intensely when he complimented her, looking up from it. "That's very kind. Thank you, darling. Your tail is rather smooth, too."

"Ah, thank ya. I used to bathe in mineral waters," Samael smiled. "You have a kind heart, I can tell. Which is why I feel this spell is perfect for you. And, for the time being, we're going to try recreating the sphere. That's why I wanted you to feel it out. I have noticed your adaptation to magic when presented."

"Ah, yes. I can feel the intricacies somewhat from its inner workings by feeling it this close," Violet noted, looking at the sphere once again. The tailor studied it for a while, letting it rest in her right hand while she tried to recreate it in her left hand. Violet had felt out the sphere's energies, seeing its qualities. As she focused in recreating the energy, a smaller sphere began to manifest on her left hand. It was much smaller. Violet acknowledged it was a bit small in the result. "I'll need to practice handling the balls—spheres—better."

The dragon tilted his head slightly while watching the tailor. "I'm sure you'll have lots of practice with that one. The lycan animalia would love to help you in the endeavor."

Violet almost dropped both spheres, blushing intensely. "W-well, yes, but I need to stay focused on the balls—I mean task—at hand."

"You're a funny one, love. I'm sure the wolf will be happy to know your commitment to staying focused on them," Samael chuckled a little. The celestial dragon's tail came forward and snatched his sphere back momentarily at the tailor's surprise before he took her hand and lightly kissed it while bending lower. "If you were a free woman, I'd certainly ask for your hand."

Violet blushed intensely as Samael kissed her hand. She became very flustered and unsure what to say.

"Continue the practice," Samael said with a nod. "I know you, of all people, can master it. When you can make one as large as mine, we'll move onto the next stage."

"Y-yes, darling," Violet nodded her head, going back to practicing what was taught. Samael oversaw her attempts, creating a new sphere for the tailor to feel out. Violet continued practicing, over and over again, with a strong sense of dedication. As the tailor's sphere of light grew in her left hand, it began to spark erratically then exploded, throwing the woman backward from the force. Samael quickly extended his tail to catch her.

“Take your time, love. No rush,” Sam said gently.

Violet took a breath with closed eyes then reopened them with renewed focus, standing on her two feet again. The tailor began practicing once more, struggling, with beads of sweat building on her brow. At one point, she created a larger sphere on her left hand, sparkling with controlled and crackling energy.

“Much better. Keep it up like this, and you’ll master it in no time,” Samael said.

The tailor kept practicing trying two spheres at once and combining it with her barrier magic to see if the effects stacked.

“Ah, there it is. Your own talent shines through. You just needed to try and make it your own,” Samael remarked, looking over the tailor’s new creation between light and barrier magic.

Violet had a radiant sphere in her hands, crackling with light energy, and shimmering with protective auras. The tailor was amazed, looking at the radiant sphere. "That is very true. It feels different without the wand. Rather draining."

Samael raised a clawed finger. “One thing to be wary of, though. I know you haven’t been going long without using a wand to act as a conduit for your magic. Right now, you’re using your body to cast the spell. Just be careful not to drain yourself too much. Can’t have you passing out in the middle of a fight now, can we? You’ve done well, miss Violet. Go take a rest. You’ve earned it, for sure.”

Violet nodded, thanking Samael for the lesson, heading off to take a rest. She patted Lunio's head before settling in.

Megan rushed after Eden to show her around the airship when finding the woman wandering about. Eden found that amusing as she'd already seen quite a bit but would gladly let Megan show her around.

"The ship has many things. What's your interests?" Megan asked Eden curiously.

"Interests...like what we're looking around for, or hobbies?" Eden asked.

"Either one, girlfriend~" Megan giggled, nudging Eden. "Can show you what you like. Or you can help set it up. The scalability of this aircraft was meant to be greater than most other known flying airships. The scientists and engineers put a lot of thought in its maintainability."

Eden laughed at that response. "Think I already have a set up for my hobbies at home. ...I'd say show me something you find interesting, but that might go over my head."

Megan beamed, pulling Eden along for a quickened walk to the ship's armory. "Behold! My other hobby! Weapons! I assist Sandra in making them. She's the engineer, and I'm the tester on their quality and ease of use. There's dummies I use them on and, well, they need to be stitched back together very often."

Eden was more than happy to go along. She could understand why they'd need to be stitched back together so often. "Oh. She made the ones the Crow brought over. They work very well."

"Yessirree~ The Crow is our merchant now. Have to get money for the materials and labor to continue crafting such fine weaponry. She fills that role in helping us," Megan smiled, leading Eden further into the armory. She moved to a metal gun cabinet and opened it revealing an assault rifle, shining bright within. "This here is my attempt to recreate an ancestor's weapon."

"It's interesting you know what it looked like." Eden examined the weapon. She found the creation interesting, commenting on the metal's craftsmanship.

"A fine relic if the Crow says so herself," the Crow said as she leaned over Eden to look at the craftsmanship as well.

"...Had a feeling you'd show up." Eden looked up at the Crow.

"There were really old blueprints that led to the recreation. Of course, it's been modernized with armor piercing rounds and whatnot, bigger clip size, and the like. We even recreated a sniper rifle whose enchanted ammo can pierce most any object but...that's a bit too dangerous to use right now..." Megan rubbed the back of her neck. "Just like our newest scientific research. A launcher whose use would decimate structures in their entirety. They're on the back burner in case it's actually needed. No need to mortar civilizations into the ground right now, gas everyone with chemicals, or something inhumane."

Eden laughed. "But you're thinking about those at least."

"Has the Crow become predictable?" the Crow chuckled.

"Only because we mentioned you this time," Eden smiled.

"This is one of the reasons the Mezmarian military haven't outright attacked us. They saw the Sable family crest on all sides of the aircraft signifying its dangerous potential. *Our* dangerous potential," Megan noted, smiling to Eden and the Crow.

Eden chuckled at that, wanting to take a closer look at the rifle. "A veiled threat, huh?"

"The Sables are a name so many of the elite know. The Crow can see why no one would attack wildly," the Crow remarked.

Megan allowed Eden to take as close a look as she liked at the rifle. "Make no mistake. We are going to get attacked when too many lines are crossed. The calculations are that this will occur on our return from the Golden Empire. Anti-aircraft weaponry is being checked over and calibrated as we speak."

Eden looked the rifle over, careful not to point it at anyone. "You used tungsten for this?"

"Sure did! Very rare metal. Hard to find and process." Megan beamed. Eden saw the name, 'Michelle Sable', engraved on the grip.

"...Tried it once. Not sure it was worth the effort...Though that might be because it wasn't a weapon as an end result," Eden remarked. She found the craftsmanship impressive.

Megan took the weapon from the other woman, rushing over to a firing range, pulling along Eden and the Crow. The short girl showed a live round session with the gun. Part of the session showed how many metal sheets it could pass through. Eden was surprised seeing the gunfire go straight through metal.

"Never doubt a Sable on their craftsmanship," The Crow nodded. "The Crow knows just how good a quality the Sables make."

Megan let Eden have a turn using the weapon. "The best part is we've been passing on our know-how to the engineers and scientists aboard the ship...The ones that aren't Sables, anyways. It's been a flaw to keep the information too secret within the family."

Eden was interested in learning a bit more about the weapon rather than using it. Megan understood and quickly pulled a yelping Eden and Crow over to a locker cabinet where the blueprints were kept.

"The Crow can see opportunities knocking in the future," the Crow nodded.

"This isn't all of the blueprints as the cabinets are alphabetical, and the entirely separate ones are for the most dangerous schematics," Megan made a note. "But the assault rifle's blueprint is in here. Both of you are free to look around at any time as you're trusted enough."

"Really? ...Is it fine to try to make one?" Eden asked.

The Crow did a little bow. "The Crow is honored to be so trusted."

"Definitely. You can go for anything you like, Eden. I'll be happy to see what you create," Megan beamed.

Eden chose something close to her comfort range. Mainly made of metal and a blueprint easy enough for her to understand. She wasn't going to try something very technical. The woman asked for clarification on parts she didn't understand, looking at it before starting. Megan provided the clarification needed, overseeing what Eden created. Managing to craft an assault rifle from the blueprint, Megan and the Crow looked over the woman's craft.

"Think it turned out okay," Eden remarked, examining the weapon for flaws.

Megan congratulated and nudged Eden, looking over the work with her. "That's quite amazing. Fast, too."

"Amazing work," the Crow said. "A natural for sure."

"Had some good instructions." Eden nudged Megan right back. She found being called a natural a bit odd. "Can't say that's really natural...Just more used to jewelry if anything. ...Might not be the most practical in comparison."

"You sell yourself short. The Crow sees much talent in you," the Crow remarked.

"We should totally hang out here someday crafting weaponry," Megan beamed.

"Really? Thank you, Crow. Can't say I'd mind that one, Megan," Eden smiled.

"I know, I know. No pudding as you don't like it. I'll bring a normal picnic for those days," Megan smiled.

"I'd appreciate that." Eden was trying not to insult the pudding.

"So, here's something I'd like to get off my chest. The pudding is meant to alleviate stress without long term ill effects like bone density loss, mental illness, and the like. It is short term. I even started to like Albert the first time I tried pudding. He...looked at me with an odd expression with some questions and I glanced back, maybe with a goofy grin. Back in pre-school. It was magical," Megan smiled. "That one moment made me tease and chase him everywhere."

"Can't exactly fault the reason why you like him," Eden chuckled. "...I just...prefer to keep my senses."

"That's fair enough. I wouldn't like to do what makes you uncomfortable," Megan smiled. "My friends I trust, and I wouldn't want to betray that."

"Makes sense," Eden remarked, looking off to the side.

In crossing the western desert wastelands northward to the Golden Empire, Violet peered outside her room's window to the environment. Thoughts crossed her mind on being ordered to be a teacher in the Vanillaville school. It was both a nobility punishment but additionally secretly overseen by others with their hands in the project. The tailor had a feeling they're all being railroaded and, consequently, seemingly unable to alter what Shadow Star, Melody, had planned. After her recent readings of the book obtained from Rebecca's house and various other learnings, Violet was getting a better grasp on the situation and formulating thoughts on what was needed. They thought they had the upper hand on her, but she felt acquainted with seeing single stray threads that could unravel the situation. Mainly it relied on various weaknesses in how the enemy had portrayed themselves, and the tailor was aiming to exploit them in the coming confrontations. There was the ethical side of her situation that was ever present, too. It would seem Violet really did need to become the villain to curb the Eternal Dream. She could not deny its allure and draw to make everything easier and safer for everyone. But, much like the hairline fractures hanging in the air widening and worsening, it was a fallacy to desire an easy way out when none had come together enough to form actual solutions.

Lunio walked to the tailor's side, staring out the same window. "Whatcha thinking about?"

"The situation, that's all," Violet noted with arms folded.

"Ah," Lunio said lightly. "Sounds serious. You guys must have a lot on your table."

"It's not serious...yet. The enemy is too comfortable and has not exercised their strength," Violet pondered.

"They sound way too confident," Lunio nodded.

"They do, and it's stemming from a grounded reality despite the unreal nature of the world's time passing by ever since Melody meddled with it. The cards are stacked in their favor. But the fact that each one of them is monitoring the situation aboard this airship bespeaks a little uncertainty in that confidence. We need to push it and make them even more uncertain," Violet thought out loud.

"How are ya gonna do that?" Lunio asked.

"Still thinking on it. So, Lunio, apparently the dragon is hitting on me, too, as you joked but has stopped in the advances because he thinks we're already together," Violet explained, wanting him to know.

"Oh?" Lunio blinked. "I mean, would you rather go out with an immortal dragon dude or a friendly wolf?"

"Truth be told, um, I had a crush before all this. Many years ago. His name was Anthony, Rebecca's butler. He hated me with a passion probably even until the point that Richard killed him and Rebecca. A lot of others feared being even remotely involved with me after gaining the Stone of Virtue. Claire had it happen, too. The...sudden change of having two being interested in me is...strange. I don't know how to take it, honestly," Violet folded her arms.

Lunio folded his ears back. "Oh, I didn't know that. Sounds like you had a hard go of it as well."

"Yes, well, coupled with the fact that the two pursuing are not entirely human males. You're a wolf animalia, and he's a celestial dragon from...hell. I find you both to be endearing but, like I said, this is strange to me so not really accustomed in...how to know what I feel on it..." Violet sighed. "I'm sorry if that sounds...probably mean or distant..."

"No, that's okay. It's probably a *little* weird," Lunio said. "Um, how's about I try making something for breakfast? I think I can do that. I used to cook when I was a kid so I'm sure I can do it now, right?"

"Certainly, darling. I'm sure you'll do fine," Violet softly smiled, checking the window for approximate distance to the Golden Empire.

Ivy looked between the two. "I'm allowed to eat too, right?"

"I would imagine so, sweetheart," Violet pondered. The tailor led Lunio and Ivy to the airship's mess hall and kitchen. The kitchen had divided sections to it for personal use whereas a few others of those sections were dedicated to chefs and the ship's food preparation. Lunio sniffed around trying to find a station he liked, moving to it, starting working out how to cook again based off of memories. Lunio was having a little trouble at first. The bacon he cooked was cut in all sorts of ways, and the eggs were a little rough around the edges. Despite that, it still was fairly good for a first attempt after so long.

“Well, it’s cooked at least,” Lunio blushed.

"To be fair, that's better than what Claire creates," Violet admitted.

“Oh? Really?” Lunio blinked.

Violet graciously ate some of the cooked meal, thanking him. "Oh, yes, this is edible."

Lunio sat beside her. “Next time, it’ll be even better.”

Ivy moved beside the two and tried some. “This is the best food I’ve had in like years.”

“Probably because you’ve been a ghost,” Lunio nodded.

"Isn't that the scientist over there that keeps making the animal-shaped food?" Violet asked with a mouth full of food, pointing across the kitchen. There was a pink-haired scientist making heart-shaped pancakes and cutting animal-shaped fruit as she hummed.

Lunio looked over. “Scientist? Oh, not the one from the mansion on the island. Had me worried.”

As Violet eyed the pink-haired scientist making food, Lunio went about trying to cook more. He saw the cute animal designed food creations of this other woman which prompted a desire to get better.

“He got inspired, huh?” Ivy asked.

"He certainly did," Violet nodded, trying to sneak over and nab some of what the pink-haired scientist made. The tailor offered a little to Lunio and Ivy while eating. “Want some?”

“Sure do,” Lunio nodded. Ivy thought they were too cute to eat. The pink-haired scientist looked back at her counter finding the food was gone, pausing a few seconds, then making a different breakfast.

"I thought so, too, Ivy. That they were really cute, but I wanted to see what the hub bub is about," Violet spoke with a smile. Suddenly, the tailor had a plate of steamed buns shaped like bunnies, edible roses, and a note that said, ‘No need to swipe. Only ask,’ to which Violet and the others looked up to see the pink-haired scientist right next to them. The tailor waved her hands in embarrassment and a bright red face. “I am terribly, terribly sorry. Forgot my manners. Won’t happen again.”

The scientist didn’t answer but turn around to retrieve dog-shaped macaroons for Lunio and cat-shaped cookies for Ivy. Lunio wondered aloud to the others if he could learn from the pink-haired scientist how to cook. Eden, Virtuous, and Sunny visited them in the mess hall and kitchen just in time to overhear the inquiry.

Violet felt Lunio could learn. Sunny, too, as she scratched under his chin. The lycan shivered as the tall blonde woman scratched under his chin and slowly relaxed into it. Sunny giggled, observing the adorable nature of the little one.

“Where did you come from?” Lunio blinked.

"Existentially or physically, little one?" Sunny softly smiled.

"Try both?" Eden chuckled.

"I meant where'd you pop out of, but I feel like a bigger question was just asked," Lunio said slowly.

"Pop out of and 'Both'...Hmm." Sunny tapped her chin. "I popped out of my mother long ago and that was physical. Existentially would point to my life coming into existence. But don't let me use up your time to learn cooking, little Lunio. Violet needs to face off with Silvie. He's awfully mad and might kill us all~"

Violet grimaced. Lunio blinked. "Wha...? Who's doing what now?"

"Death for the 'Wha...?', and Silvie for the 'Who's doing what now?'" Sunny nodded with a smile. "Learn to cook quickly, little Lunio. No pressure."

Eden was laughing at how this went from coming into existence, learning to cook, and then to we all might die. "I don't think that cooking has much to do with the last point."

"It's super important to cook, though," the pink-haired scientist said from the background.

Lunio was quite confused. "Ok...I guess...Feels like crazier things are gonna happen...but I guess Imma go cook?"

"Yes, unless you want Violet to die without a practiced meal. No worries, though. We've only now crossed into Golden Empire territory. Have a few minutes, or seconds. I can't remember the territory too well," Sunny smiled. Eden was having a blast just listening to the tall blonde woman.

Lunio looked from Sunny to Violet. "Umm..."

"Thirty minutes until landing," Sandra announced over the intercom.

"Oh! Thirty minutes," Sunny giggled. "Tick-tock~ Tick-tock~"

Violet believed in Lunio. The lycan gulped then walked to the kitchen to start learning with a timer hanging over his head. The pink-haired scientist rushed over to assist him.

Eden asked while laughing, "Are you going to convince him his cooking is do or die every time?"

"Most things are do or die, little one, with the right mindset," Sunny softly smiled to Eden.

"More like the wrong mindset, darling," Violet chimed in. The tailor cheered on Lunio.

"I can see that," Eden replied, laughing. Lunio waved back to Violet as he cooked with the pink-haired scientist. Virtuous wasn't paying attention to anything other than eating more suspicious animal-shaped food he just found in the kitchen.

Violet let Lunio know that she and the others had to go then went to collect everyone at the airship's exit. Looking out the window, the group members that arrived saw expansive mountains among the clouds. The mountain they were headed to had an old castle upon it that appeared abandoned visually. Sandra had the airship's navigation team land the craft near the old castle at the south end of the mountain. Violet led the group from the airship when ready.

As the tailor led the group members to investigate the old castle, they found a few griffons dressed in white escorting several other griffons who were in military clothes. Violet called out to them to garner attention. The griffon in military fatigues turned in surprise while the ones dressed in white robes put up their clawed hands to attack.

"In this visitation, we have an inquiry as to the involvement of one named Silver Cross of Puregloss," Violet called out. "Why is he in this country? This is the matter in which we have come to address."

The griffons seemed somewhat confused. The white-robed ones appeared defensive.

"Who in Vastria are you?" one of the military griffons asked.

"Violet Diamond, a simple tailor from the country of Mezmaria in attendance of my dear friends and family," the tailor declared proudly with hands on her hips.

"Being secretive or undercover is not our style, is it?" Vivian asked.

"I'm not good at lying and being sneaky when not taking food..." Violet blushed, rubbing the back of her neck.

The griffons in military fatigues looked to one another then walked over, observing the group. "You want to talk about Puregloss?"

The white-robed griffons stood where they were.

"That and the slavery of harpies," Violet nodded. Eden found the tailor's blunt speaking to be amusing.

"The rumors are true then?" one of the military griffons asked.

"What rumors?" Violet asked in curiosity.

"Rumors we came to discuss with Father Wolf," the military griffon remarked.

"Explain what Mr. Wolf said, and we'll see if he relayed it correctly," Violet folded her arms.

"We've heard rumors floating around of children in white cloaks expressing blank looks. Like that of zombies," the griffon said.

"Gentleman. Gentleman," a voice called out as a familiar griffon clad in white came from the old castle. Father Maximillion Wolf. "It is such a pleasure to see you. And what is this? The beautiful woman returned to me?"

Violet and her group along with the military griffons turned their gaze to the approaching priest. Father Maximillion Wolf strolled from the old castle's main gates with three white-robed griffons behind him.

"Ah, hello, Mr. Wolf. Have you changed your ways yet?" Violet asked.

"Whatever do you mean, my dear?" the griffon said as he reached for the tailor's hand. He pulled his clawed hand away seeing Violet ready a needle to stab him again.

"Do you have harpy captives here and have you accepted assistance from one named Silver Cross of Puregloss?" Violet asked again in a stern tone.

"My dear, we have no captives," Father Wolf remarked with a smile. "Just loyal acolytes ready for the cause."

"Let me and those I came with be the first to wake you up from your delusions and dreams of cult-like behavior," Violet spoke, looking to the others in the group, then pulling out her weapon. "Ready the offense. Our captives have arrived. We attack now."

Eden laughed as Violet was taking captives, but she and the others got armed. The military griffons were quite surprised at the sudden call to arms by the woman.

"My goodness, you wish to fight us? Such a hostile woman you are," Father Wolf said slowly.

"Well, duh, she's evil," Virtuous laughed, pulling his sword out.

"I am not evil," Violet shook her head.

"Ready for the violence, little one," Sunny softly smiled.

"I'm pretty sure the option of surrender is on the table if you don't want to fight," Eden joked.

Father Wolf's smile fell. He spread his wings as did the white-robed griffons by his side and flew back to the old castle. The military griffons were greatly confused.

"You're only making this harder to chase you down!" Violet called out to him.

"What is this all about? Are you with the Golden Empire or something?" one of the military griffons asked.

"We're independent. Coming aboard as captives or are we forcing you? Either one is fine, darling. We have plenty of nice accommodations," Violet offered.

The military griffons looked to one another. “We didn’t come with weapons or anything. This was just supposed to be an investigation.”

“There’s like twelve of you. I hardly think it’d be a battle we could win,” the other griffon shrugged.

"An investigation? Ah, can we join?" Violet asked.

“I don’t know at this point...” the first griffon said slowly. “I’m fairly sure Maximillion isn’t going to open the gates again after that one.”

"Want us to open it?" Violet offered.

“I guess so...” the military griffon nodded. Three white-robed griffons stood by the gate at the ready.

Violet looked to Sandra. The engineer scientist radioed into the airship to open fire on the gate. The military griffons fell backward and looked on in shock as the old castle’s gate was bombarded with gunfire and explosions from the airship. The white-robed griffons standing near it were tossed aside, bleeding.

"Let's go investigate," Violet beamed, helping up the griffon military folk.

“My goodness! M-miss Violet? Are you really attacking my fort?!” Father Wolf called out from a loudspeaker on the side of the old castle. “This is a little beyond hostile at this point!”

"I *did* say that you won't like it when I come around again! When you're not doing better things with your life, darling! It was a fair warning! You lie when you smile! That’s how I know you’re still doing wrong! It's downhill from here! We’re coming inside now!" Violet shouted, leading the others toward the old castle.

“You’re working with the Golden Empire after all, aren’t you!? You wish to eradicate all my work!?” Father Wolf shouted back. “Then, fine! If that is the case, I’ll have to resort to more drastic measures!”

“For the rebellion!” White-robed griffons flew out from the old castle’s opening where the gate had stood. They attempted to surround Violet and the others, raising their clawed hands to open fire with beams of light. Violet raised a temporary barrier around the group, deflecting the attempts to their astonishment, then a stronger one that stayed longer around Claire.

Eden touched the ground, eyes turning a slightly more vibrant green. Seeing Violet put a barrier on Claire, she placed a root in front of Millie.

“The direct approach is normally the most blunt and painful at times,” Eve remarked. She looked to Violet then ran at a white-robed griffon near the ground trying to punch them, but they flew out of the way.

Vivian put both hands together and fired a moonlight cannon at one of the white-robed griffons knocking them out of the air. Megan went after another griffon with her taffy spear, using it like a boomerang. The griffon cried out in pain getting cut by the spear then fired holy bolts at Megan, Rachael, and Vivian. Megan

dodged the attack while Rachael's bubble shield popped. Vivian spun around catching the holy bolt and throwing it back at the griffon hitting them square in the chest.

Sunny sweated trying to dodge the holy magic shot at her by some griffons. "Eek! Ahh! Oh no! Not the light!"

Buddy started to rev up a chainsaw and shotgun combination weapon the Crow had sold him just as white-robed griffon knights charged out of the old castle towards the group with swords held. One of the knights stabbed Rachael then knocked her to the side onto the ground. Vivian was then slashed by a holy blade, falling to the ground.

"I will choke you," Sunny softly threatened with narrowed eyes seeing what happened to Rachel.

The black and white clown finished revving his chainsaw weapon, rushing at the enemy griffons as they started to scatter. The griffons flew into the air to avoid the clown but were shocked to find him running on air, defying gravity. "All around the trees! The clown chased the kill! The kill thought it was a big joke! Pop! Goes the kill!"

Griffon after griffon was cut by the clown except for one that dodged him in flight. Two of the griffon knights on the ground managed to avoid him, too. Violet took out Lord Gold's gun, aiming it at one of the griffon knights badly injured by the clown. It didn't turn out well for him. Sandra's shoulder-mounted turret and hand cannon opened fire on the griffon knights. The old castle's defenses were breaking up in the onslaught while Claire healed the group members injured with Millie's assistance.

Ivy grimaced a little from beside Violet. "I haven't been, like, alive in a while so don't judge me too harshly if I miss."

The tailor assured the girl that she wouldn't as Ivy extended an hand out at one of the white-robed griffons. Their shadow was set on fire and the flier, too. The griffon screamed as she was engulfed in black flames.

"You can set shadows on fire?" Violet blinked.

"Y-yeah," Ivy nodded lightly. "Is that bad?"

Sunny went after the griffon that hurt Rachael, putting both hands together and firing a beam of darkness at them. The griffon knight dodged though was badly burned in the process. Luminous flew at the one that attacked Vivian, slicing at the griffon, but got knocked away. Rachael slowly wobbled to her feet wondering what she ever did to these griffons to be targeted so heavily. Vulpus charged up green flames then threw them at the white-robed griffons, hitting two of them, setting them ablaze. Chester liked the idea of setting things on fire right now. The bunny raised his little bunny paws into the air sending forth nine walls of flames at the enemy.

Virtuous really liked watching the chainsaw massacre from earlier. It brought a tear to his eye. He wanted to get in on that, laughing maniacally, as he revved up his own chainsaw and shotgun combined weapon bought from the Crow. One of the griffon knights flying frantically to avoid the raging bunny and mimic

found a bone whip wrapping around his neck by Eden. This was followed up by Eve rushing forward and punching the flier hard enough to crack bones.

Vivian took out her Moonlight Lunaria wand and casted acid on the enemy frantically trying to either escape or figure out how to counter attack. Megan followed this up by calling down thunder from the sky to super charge her taffy spear then threw it at a griffon, stabbing them through. Three of the white-robed griffons found an opportunity to attack the group back. Sunny squealed trying to run for it but then was blasted with holy light. Vivian was blown back, rolling across the ground. Both were quickly healed by Millie to the griffons' dismay.

Five of the griffon knights charged forward seeing their own opportunity with holy blades at the ready. Sunny ran for it, seeing two knights rushing her and was cut down. Sandra, too, got cut down from them. One of the knights tried attacking Eden but a vine shot up from the ground and stabbed them.

Buddy snuck up on one of the white-robed griffons, swinging the chainsaw twice, followed up by a point-blank shotgun blast. The griffon was caught unaware, getting cut by the chainsaw once, dodged the second swing, but then blasted by the shotgun, downing them. Violet switched to her hand cannon taking aim at another white-robed griffon, shooting them. Rachael tried to cast acid from her wand at a griffon, but they deflected it back at Chester who squeaked in horror and barely dodged it. Vulpus tried out casting acid from her own wand at the griffons watching it burn away their armor, finding that to be cool.

As Claire went to heal Sandra and Sunny, Ivy put both hands together trying to focus on a shadow to engulf it in flames but was seemingly unable. Sunny, when healed by Claire, once again went after the one that hurt Rachael to make good on that choking threat, wrapping a whip around their throat.

"You rebellion officers are exhausting Claire with this unneeded violence, putting more stress on her. For that, Judgement comes this day." Luminous floated above, pointing at the enemy as seven swords circled around him. Five of the griffon knights were cut through by the attack.

"Make that acid rain, baby!" Chester hopped into the air, siphoning magic, then casting acid. A few of the griffons were melted by the acid, an act in which the bunny kind of regretted doing such a thing.

Virtuous mimicked what Buddy did with his chainsaw and shotgun combined weapon, swinging it twice at a griffon followed up by a shotgun blast. The outcome was the same, ending the griffon in brutal fashion.

"Copying me, huh?" Buddy looked to Virtuous. The mimic grinned wanting to mock the clown and turn into him...but strangely couldn't.

Eden put a root in front of Sunny after witnessing how much they were targeting the woman. Eve pulled out her gun, took aim at a white-robed griffon, and fired a shot. However, they ducked for cover behind some debris. Vivian pulled out her Crescent long blade, swinging, and sending a crescent beam at the enemy, hitting a griffon. Megan followed this up by rushing the enemy and stabbing them with her taffy spear. Millie rushed in and ended them with her great sword.

Two griffon knights rushed Violet and Sunny. The tailor gracefully teleported out of the way with dramatic flair. The root in front of Sunny sprang to life, impaling the poor griffon, quickly growing around

him, and blooming bright red roses, holding his dead body captive in the center still poised as he was about to attack. The other knights gasped seeing this take place. Sunny's eyes widened as this is was one of the most beautiful things she'd ever seen.

"...It blossomed that time?" Eden asked, a bit confused.

"Oh, wow! That's really cool!" Vulpus cheered.

Buddy tapped his chin in thought. A light bulb appeared above his head turning on. With pointer raised, the clown took the light bulb into his hand. It turned into candy-shaped bombs. The clown laughed throwing them at the enemy. "Sweet treat for your defeat!"

"Candy!" The griffon knights screamed as they fled. Buddy snapped his fingers. Maybe murder by candy bombs would be successful another day.

"The Rebellion on this day will know a new enemy by way of an independent stance against them! Violet Diamond of Mezmaria is here to make that clear! As long as you desecrate the sanctity of harpy lives with a feud that should had ended long ago in the Sky Empyrean, this cannot go unchecked! Especially with the coinciding activity of Silver Cross of Puregloss!" Violet declared in shouts toward the enemy and their castle, taking out the Copy Cat wand, raising it at one of the knights. The tailor blasted the knight with immense light sending them into the castle's wall to which they did not get up again. The other knights started to flee the mountain in fear with one remaining. The griffon knight that stayed demanded the others return and stay fighting.

Rachael took a sip of her soda then extended a hand to the griffon knight left behind. The hovering girl clenched her fist, telekinetically crushing the knight and their armor.

"This is only going to get worse for you! Surrender!" Violet shouted at the remaining, white-robed griffons and remaining knight on the ground.

"I-I surrender!" the griffon knight on the ground screamed, panting heavily.

Two of the white-robed griffons shook their heads. "Fool! We fight for our lord!"

Violet looked to Sandra as the engineer radioed in a group to come and collect the captives shortly before smirking at the white-robed griffons. The woman didn't hesitate to raise her hand cannon and shoulder-mounted turret at them.

The griffons ducked for cover from a hail of bullets. "Father Wolf! We need help! Please deliver us!"

"Yes, Father Wolf! Please do come down here and deliver your own people!" Violet shouted. "To me!"

Eight small soldiers marched forward out of the old castle. They were harpies. Their eyes were glazed over.

“You have asked. So, I deliver,” Father Wolf announced over the speaker. The white-robed griffons flew for the old castle as Violet tried to dispel the magic on the harpies. A bright light engulfed the area, repelling the tailor’s attempt. “I don’t think so, miss Violet. I have been training these soldiers for some time. I *must* see them in action.”

"Delivering your own people means harpies, does it? Thought you were a griffon. Somebody is hiding a secret~" Violet smiled.

“Wolf?! Why in Vastria are you training children!?” a military griffon called out from the back of the fighting area. The investigating griffons had been silently observing until this point. “Harpy children, no less! Do you have any idea what people will say if they find out!?”

“These children have seen the errors of their ways and fight for our cause. A cause that their ancestors caused to happen in the first place!” Father Wolf fired back.

"Going to guess he's mixed between griffon and harpy at least. ...Must be overcompensating by doing this," Eden chuckled. Vivian agreed with a nod.

"If you believe that, then you do not know the true history of the Sky Empyrean!" Violet called out.

“I have heard the stories of the harpies and what they did to our nation!” Father Wolf snarled. “I am fine in here, thank you! I do not need to prove anything to you!”

"Your nation was founded by a harpy!" Violet shouted. "Commander Hurricane! Did you forget!?"

“Impossible!” Father Wolf snarled. “It was griffons! And griffons alone!”

"Who destroyed the internal workings of the Sky Empyrean, Father Wolf!? And don't you dare say harpies! It came from Puregloss! Her name was Queen Gabrielle!" Violet shouted. "You're now accepting Silver Cross of Puregloss's help! Do you not see the bitter irony!?"

“What!?” Father Maximillion yelled in a confused tone.

"I will say again that, if you believe harpies to be the true enemy, then you both deny your Founder and reason for the country's prior destruction!" Violet declared. “You are denying what makes the country it is today!”

Silence filled the air as the eight harpy soldiers remained still. It lasted nearly ten minutes before Violet and the others saw Father Maximillion Wolf begrudgingly step out of the old castle. He looked slightly broken by this news after considering his own findings. “You speak the truth, miss Violet? But it was because of Puregloss that our faith was restored...that we’d have our True Lihara...”

"I don't lie, darling." Violet placed a hand on her chest, seeing Father Wolf come out. "Silver Cross is living a delusion of grandeur. The same as was done by Queen Gabrielle long ago but on a different spectrum. If you believe Lihara existed, then know that that was Queen Gabrielle in disguise to fool the country of old."

Eden busted out laughing. "She did what?"

"You're saying the King of Heaven is another lie from Puregloss?" Father Wolf asked slowly, trying to figure out what the tailor knew.

"A lie in that a civil war will be yet another genocide. This here is Virtuous Love, last of the mimics, victim of another genocide," Violet gestured to the man that growled. "To side with Silver Cross means to side with the King of Heaven. But Silver is deluded in that he doesn't understand his actual role as a Holy Man and will ultimately carry out what *you* desire to its fullest degree...The genocide of all harpies. Is that what you really want? Do you really want the full weight of an entire race killed on your soul under false assumptions?"

"I do not know any longer. I wanted to use the harpies as revenge for splitting my country," Father Wolf said softly. "I wanted to fix the mistakes of the past."

"The harpies only began that splitting of the country long ago because of deceit from Puregloss. Do you now understand my reasoning for being here?" Violet asked. "Why I absolutely *need* to intervene?"

"Then Puregloss has been our enemy since ancient times?" a military griffon asked.

"Yes, the Sky Emphyrean's true enemy. My ancestor Erika, her friends and family, defended the country's destruction. I'm here to help. Let me—us—help again." Violet extended her hand to the military griffons and Father Wolf.

Father Wolf sighed lightly, reaching to take Violet's hand once more, to kiss of course. "How can a griffon say no to a woman such as you?"

Violet blushed, not expecting that. "I need you all to stop this nonsense of harming your own citizens. Both harpies and griffons. A country can never grow if it is in constant civil war."

"We have been under another lie..." the military griffon sighed. "When the higher ups of the rebellion find out...When the Golden Empire find out we were nothing but fools...The rebellion will go down as a long and terrible joke."

Father Wolf pulled his white robe off and threw it to the mountain's dirt. "Pointless..."

"The rebellion. The Golden Empire. They're not going to find out. May you all bask in the light of righteous fury," a voice was heard from the heavens above.

"Silvie?" Sunny looked upward. The tailor's eyes shot upward in fear then to the others near her.

"Everyone! Run! Run for your lives! Get away from the castle!" Violet shouted. She started pushing on the others to make the dire implication clear they needed to flee. The griffons took off flying. The rest sped away from the old castle as asked. The injured griffon knight hobbled after the group, picked up by Megan and Sandra. Violet, Claire, Luminous, and Buddy made grabs for the harpy soldier to carry the children to safety.

What started as a single ray of light in the sky, far above, aimed at the old castle was now expanding into a massive ray of red hot fiery white magic. It bore right through the castle's material straight down into the earth, burning and expanding. As the mountain's peak was incinerated with holy magic, the fear Violet felt spread to the others seeing the threat come alive. Silver Cross had arrived, far above the group, attempting to eradicate all life on the mountain with a power never seen before.

"Jeez!" Vivian shouted while she and the others ran for their lives. "He's really trying to kill us all!"

Eve turned her eyes back while they ran and saw a floating figure high above at the end of the ray of light. White wings, glowing a whitish yellow gold. Focusing further revealed Silver's countenance, focused, and unyielding. Eve also saw him suddenly look back at her, raising his other hand, blasting out another trailing blaze of holy magic now following the fleeing group members.

"Silver is very, very upset! Perhaps this is revenge for...um, something I'd done a few years ago!" Eve gulped.

Violet, Megan, Virtuous, Buddy, Vivian, Father Maximillion, one griffon knight, and one harpy child got burned badly by Silver's beam of burning hot holy magic. One of the harpy children was dead. In that burning anguish of those that survived, they felt like the world was spinning and showing them a realm beyond death where golden gates amid white clouds slowly came nearer but then faded when they made it to the airship.

Chester, Luminous, Sandra, Claire, Eden, Vulpus, Rachael, Millie, Eve, Sunny, Ivy, two military griffons, one griffon knight, and six harpy children made it unscathed to the airship. Silver stopped his beam of lights when the group reached the airship with a look of confusion. The holy man of light floated down to the group. Claire went about healing those that safely made it to the airship.

Vivian was practically crawling after getting hit by the terrible light attack. "Wh-why do so many of our enemies use light magic!?"

Ivy wiped the sweat from her brow as she avoided the light. "All nine of my new lives flashed before my eyes there."

"Father Maximillion Wolf. Come forth," Silver spoke as he floated downward, touching soil, body glowing brightly yellowish gold, wings extended then folding in. Violet, Megan, Virtuous, and Buddy were trying to regain their senses. Behind Silver Cross was an enflamed crater where the mountain's center used to be.

Father Wolf staggered forward, holding one arm after taking such a hit. "You certainly look angelic for sure..."

Silver Cross gestured to the crater behind him. "Father Maximillion, your crimes against the *true* Lihara, and King of Heaven, were unfounded, sinful, and regrettable. You still have *hope* to follow me into a new age of the Golden Empire. Do you repent and desire my guidance to a better future of light?"

"The King of Heaven? Is he a lie? I do not wish to follow a lie. Our faith has been following so many lies," Father Wolf spoke, fearfully eyeing the crater behind the winged man.

"The King of Heaven is most assuredly no lie. You have seen the power bestowed upon me by Him," Silver gestured once again to the crater.

"It is not King of Heaven that is a lie, but the ideals of being an idol. There was, and never should be, a 'Lihara', Silver," Violet spoke, standing up.

"Says the one that harbors demons in her midst," Silver spoke with annoyance at the tailor.

"Lihara was a lie for sure," Eve said. "Through research, I've discovered that Lihara was, in fact, a ploy used by a woman who, may or may not, have been a demon herself. Records of this woman are fairly scarce."

"If the records are scarce, then how can that be verified as truth?" Silver folded his arms. "Science cannot provide answers to areas of faith."

"Vice versa," Sandra responded, adjusting her goggles.

"We believe in the King of Heaven. We believe that the kingdom of the sky must return to its religious roots but not under the guise of a fake 'Lihara'," one of the military griffons said. "No one in our ranks would fight for that."

"These records of Lihara in the past were taken from the Golden Empire's official files shared with Mezmaria and Puregloss, Silver," Eve shrugged. "Also Violet and the Stones of Virtue. She has seen the past through the stones. I believe my sister."

"Even if it were a guise before, *I* will become the *true* Lihara the Golden Empire always desired," Silver announced. "I will guide this nation back to its roots as is desired."

"That's insanity, Silver! You cannot meddle in the affairs of the Golden Empire by pretending to be their deity!" Violet shouted.

As Eden busted out laughing at the 'holy' man's words on being another 'Lihara' garnering a glare from Silver, a Mezmarian news helicopter covered in glitter flew in closer. Sandra received word from the group's airship that this helicopter had been watching the entire time.

"You...are Lihara?" Father Wolf asked Silver with a confused expression though hinting subtle belief in it after the demonstrated power moments ago.

"Be blind to faith and truth. I care not for the foolish and blind with little *hope*. I *am* Lihara," Silver extended his wings dramatically and striking a pose, catching rays of light with them.

"This guy is absolutely bonkers." Eden enjoyed watching this.

"Demons are not to be believed. They have no *hope* of it," Silver waved his hand dismissively.

"So what? You'll choose not to believe anything I say to spite me or something? Because that would be even funnier," Eden laughed.

"You're an odd one," Silver shrugged at Eden. Sunny kept saying 'Silvie' with some words of love, but he resigned to not pay her any attention.

"I see it now. You have been blessed by heaven..." Father Wolf spoke almost breathlessly. A reaction that worried Violet as she glanced over to the griffon. "I will plead my sins. I know that the harpies are not our enemies now. I will work together with them to destroy the Golden Empire and its evil ways."

"He is an enemy of this nation and an outside influence! Don't believe him!" Violet yelled at Father Wolf.

"I do not know anymore. He is radiant and heavenly like stories of old," Father Wolf spoke in awe, raising a clawed hand up to Silver as though close enough to touch. "How can I not believe a God that stands before me?"

"Come to Lihara, child of heaven." Silver held his hand out to Father Wolf.

"No! Come with us!" Violet held her own hand out to Father Wolf.

The griffon priest, to the tailor's dismay and aggravation, chose to take the 'holy' man's hand with full unquestionable faith in him.

"That poor guy is so mixed up, huh?" Ivy said lightly.

"You have chosen wisely." Silver took Father Wolf's hand and pulled him closer under his wing.

Violet stamped her foot in frustration. "Fine! You want me to reveal the truth of Silver Cross?! Here it is! Silver is not old enough to make decisions for himself at a reasonable adult level for he was borne from Richard Cross of Puregloss Kingdom. The purified manifestation brought forth by Queen Valentina of Mezmaria. He desired three things while we travelled through Filltroske: Being the Man of Light and Hope, Being with Princess Aria, and Being with Sunny Sympathy. Princess Aria fell back to her original husband, Richard Cross. Prince Charming, their child, was never Silver's. However, while fulfilling his desire to be with Sunny, he kept visiting Princess Aria, Richard, and their child leaving Sunny by herself. A mentally unstable woman. Silver, you already failed at getting with Princess Aria. Why did you abandon Sunny to her own mind with your actual child? You lost two things that you wanted. Now you're hanging onto the last hope. To be the Man of Light and Hope while being a failure in every other respect."

Silver denied these words of the tailor, turning his head to the side with a 'hmpf'. Father Wolf didn't listen to a word of the hurtful lecture towards his savior.

"Silver, you gotta snap out of it! You're not a bad guy," Vivian pleaded. "You were so nice and stuff back in the forest. But now...I think...I think you killed others just now. Even kids. Is that really what a god would do?"

"I have saved their souls with the grace of light providing *hope* in everlasting salvation," Silver raised his free hand's finger. "Father Wolf was to be punished. His work wiped out and redone to soon be in the true ways of Lihara."

"And they said I was a crazy," Virtuous laughed. Eden found it funny, too.

"Saved their souls..." Vulpus blinked.

"Those innocent kids were brainwashed puppets of that guy over there," Vivian said with narrowed eyes. "You and I are the same age. Both born in that terrible forest. This really the route you're going?"

"I'm sorry, Vivian, but this is the path I must take. I will be the true Lihara the Golden Empire needs," Silver Cross spoke, turning to fly off with Maximillion, taking one last look at the group and their airship. "I will be merciful today and spare you holy wrath. Let us *hope* to not cross paths again for I will be forced to smite you all."

As Silver Cross took off, Sandra had her portable radio out, listening to it as the glitter-covered helicopter circled them. "Huh, news station in Mezmaria is saying Violet caused the island's crater, and this Silver guy is a hero for stopping her. And all the tailor could do is badmouth him when he did so..."

Violet was now rubbing her temples. "Of course I'm the bad guy again. My actions and words keep getting me hated by others. I'd apologize if given the chance having only ever wanted other's happiness."

"You guys get in trouble a lot, huh?" Ivy said as she looked up to Violet.

"Yes, we do. In fact, let's get in more trouble and join the Golden Empire in this fight and head to their capital," Violet said, coming to a decision. "If Silver Cross wants to play hard ball, then so be it."

Vivian sighed softly, watching Silver Cross fly off. The girl closed her eyes, slowly shaking her head.

"That man...he's going to put a spark under the rebellion's feathers," one of the military griffons sighed.

"Yes, they're going to attack as soon as that happens," Violet nodded. "We need to join the Golden Empire and now."

Violet led everyone aboard the airship making sure the harpy children were taken care of. The airship engineers and scientists came to a conclusion to start writing up designs and schematics to house the children aboard in something like a nursery. The children were, more or less, the same as the child they saved before, brainwashed and out of it.

"We live to serve, miss," the harpy children said in unison to the tailor causing Violet to grimace.

"...Well, that isn't creepy in the slightest," Eden tilted her head at that.

"Please don't say it like that, sweethearts," Violet grimaced.

"Obey your evil queen, hoodlums!" Virtuous shouted from the back.

"We will obey our evil queen," the harpy children nodded in unison. "Glory to the Wings of Justice."

"Glory to the Wings of Justice!" Virtuous and Luminous cheered. The latter liked the last word.

"I hope there weren't any more of those poor kids in that place before Silver..." Millie grimaced.

"I certainly hope not, but I feel like there were many others," Violet sighed. Sunny found it sad that Silver didn't say he loved her back.

The two military griffons took off their hats. "Before we go any further, a proper introduction is in order."

"I am corporal Ian Rodgers," the one griffon said.

"And I am Lieutenant Geoffrey Cook," the other griffon announced.

"Pleasure to make your acquaintance, Ian and Geoffrey," Violet softly smiled to the two.

"We have little to offer I'm afraid but will help in what ways we can," Geoffrey nodded.

"How about aerial defense?" Sandra asked. "We need more fliers in case of it."

"You have fighters?" Ian asked.

"Quite a bit but more is always welcome," Sandra nodded. "Aircraft, too, if you don't want to endanger your physical body."

The little reformed harpy came out. Her eyes drifted between each of the young harpies that were escorted to the brig for their safety.

"M-miss...are they going to be okay?" The harpy girl asked as she walked to Violet.

"They were...the only ones we could rescue, sweetheart," Violet spoke, looking to the reformed harpy. "Need to snap them out of the trance that Maximillion had them under."

"R-right..." the harpy girl nodded lightly. "Um, thank you, miss."

As Violet comforted the young harpy girl, and she headed off, Eden consoled Sunny knowing it must be very hard that her husband has come out as a woman.

"Thank you, little one," Sunny sniffled, leaning against Eden.

Violet led the others to the airship's command center and tried to see where to go with Eve and Sandra.

“We should get in contact with the griffon from before. The one who helped against Richard,” Eve said. Lunio arrived and scurried over with cookies and raviolis that he and the pink-haired scientist made. Each was animal-shaped.

"Most definitely," Violet agreed. "But where would he be-!?"

The tailor let out a squeal of delight seeing the cookies, thanking Lunio, and snatching them up.

"That a flower cat?" Sandra pointed at the ravioli.

“We made cookies!” Lunio cheered. “Nope, they’re noodles. They just look like flowers is all.”

Eden didn't expect noodles that looked like pots of plants with cat faces.

“Likely in the Golden Empire or on his ship,” Eve pondered trying to garner the tailor’s attention again. “Likely both, honestly.”

"Cookies!" Violet cheered, holding two up with a mouth full, crumbs spraying about. Eve looked at her sister and slowly blinked.

"But why make ravioli look like...? Never mind." Sandra shook her head, looking to the navigational officers on direction to the empire's capital. The engineer suddenly got a call from the kitchen with a ‘why not?’ question to which she couldn’t answer.

Lunio watched Violet eat the cookies in a rambunctious way. “Well, I know what to get you from now on.”

“What’s our plan for when Silver Cross returns?” Eve asked.

"More cookies!?" Violet's eyes widened with delight. Sandra glanced from Eve to Violet, snapping her fingers in the tailor's face until she came to her senses. "Oh, um, Silver Cross...yeah...I have an idea but need practice with Queen Lani and some theory testing."

“Queen Lani? Well, it should be a little bit before we arrive at the empire’s capital of Goldenrod,” Eve nodded.

Violet patted Lunio's head, thanking him once again, then headed off to find Queen Lani. As the tailor headed out, she overheard Sandra and Eve starting to get in a debate over the operational uses of the airship as opposed to design specs. The other group members ran for it as the topic was boringly technical. The reformed harpy girl saw the tailor walking the airship’s hallways and tagged along, getting picked up by the woman.

The tailor knocked on Queen Lani's door. The woman opened the door, tucking her wings in. “Come back for another lesson?”

Violet performed an elegant bow the best she could, while carrying the young harpy girl. "Yes, Queen Lani. I need instruction on better barrier magic use. And magical interference theory."

The harpy girl looked to Violet then the other woman and bowed as well when lowered to the floor guessing she was a superior.

"Barrier magic, huh? What did you have in mind?" Queen Lani asked curiously.
"The uses of an inverted barrier to cut off outside interference, specifically," Violet noted.

Queen Lani put a hand to her chin. "Interestingly specific."

Violet awaited Lani's thoughts on the matter with a moment to mull it over. It was magic the queen knew about but was troubling from who its knowledge came from long ago. The mention of it was bringing back bad memories to which the queen had to sit down while breathing slightly quicker.

As this happened, a knock came to Queen Lani's room. The door opened revealing it was Eve. "Violet, we need your assistance for a moment."

Violet let Queen Lani know she'd be back, placing a hand on the woman's back, then headed for the bridge. The young harpy girl stayed behind, eyeing the late queen with a curious look.

On the main communication screen of the bridge, Violet could see Luis's face when arriving. "Hello, Miss Diamond. It is surprising to see you so soon."

"Oh, hello, Mr. Salvana. How are you?" Violet softly smiled.

"Quite well, quite well. Your sister has told us you wish to have an audience with the king. Is this correct?" Luis asked excitedly.

"We do, indeed," Violet nodded. "The Golden Empire is about to be attacked by the Rebellion, partly led by Silver Cross of Puregloss. He has the King of Heaven's power on his side which will devastate the empire, I can assure you. But we're here now to interrupt his plans of becoming...well, the 'True Lihara' as he put it."

"I see," Luis said lightly, caught off guard by the words. "Ah, yes, that does sound like a grave issue our emperor will need to know the full scope of. Thank you for this information, Miss Violet. I will send you coordinates. A spot to rendezvous with your ship. We can escort you to the capital."

"Thank you, Luis. Rest assured, we're not going to sit idly by while Silver Cross tries his hand at being a god," Violet waved a finger.

"I will see you very soon, my dear. Till then—She's coming, guys! I told you so!" Luis said to some others off camera before the screen went blank.

Violet took a moment, staring at the blank screen when Luis departed, rubbing her chin, eyes drifting to the windows to view outside. After a few moments, she headed off to Queen Lani's room once again.

"A word, miss?" Lt. Geoffrey, the military griffon, called to her before Violet left. "You're the closest thing to a leader as far as I can tell. Do you know anything of the Golden Empire and its emperor?"

Violet halted her leave, turning to the griffon. "The only information I know of is they believe in their own strength, not so much the religious aspects that have gripped the nation for so long. I'm most likely not knowing their whole story but time is short."

"The emperor came when the country was at our lowest point. He seized power and denounced the old ways," Lt. Geoffrey remarked.

"What are your thoughts on him?" Violet asked curiously.

"Hard to say in all fairness. Only rumors."

"Would you say he's narcissistic?" Violet asked.

"Most likely. Dragons usually are," Lt. Geoffrey nodded.

"Would you say he leads the people cruelly or dutifully?" Violet asked her follow up question.

Lt. Geoffrey shrugged. "I mean, probably cruelly. I'm going to be a little biased, but you should still be cautious."

"You make it sound like he shouldn't be cautious of us," Violet softly smiled. "Which, granted, is how he *should* see it."

Lt. Geoffrey nodded lightly as Violet turned her head away from the griffon with her eyes being the last to depart his visuals before the tailor headed off back to Queen Lani. Outside of the airship's windows, the occupants saw flashes of light off in the distance every now and then as Silver Cross caused destruction. Violet knew that he had begun to exercise his strength and bring more under his wing by fear.

Eden headed back to the airship's botanical garden. It was either her favorite place, or she was lost. The demonic woman found many new flowers, vegetables, fruits, and trees were planted and fully grown. Some animals were brought in, too. The old man from before now had a monkey on his shoulder. Eden laughed at the monkey being on the guy's shoulder. "Why'd they bring in a monkey?"

"They didn't. I did, my child," the old man, Father Caleb smiled. The monkey threw Eden a pomegranate. "As is the tiger hiding in the bushes to your left. He won't cause harm, though, I assure you."

"That's still funny," Eden remarked, looking to her left, surprised to spot a tiger laying down with a parrot on its head. She was confused how the old man pulled this off.

"It took a bit of persuading to get him here, grumpy as he is," Father Caleb answered Eden's thoughts as he looked at the tiger as it growled. "But he's rather calm now."

"He's calm now! Bwaak!" the parrot on its head squawked.

"That's a bit of a feat," Eden admitted.

"It's no trouble, my child. You're free to pet or ride him if you wish. That one kitsune, Vulpus I believe, kept riding him earlier." Father Caleb stroked his beard.

Eden laughed. "I don't think I want to mess with him."

"The interesting part is some like small cats but not the big ones. They're rougher around the edges, but it's only nature's way of it." Father Caleb stroked his beard in thought. "Some of my activities work in mysterious ways, my child. Do you, by chance, have a favorite animal?"

"Haven't put any thought into it." Eden pondered it now.

"I will have to bring in more animals then," the old man chuckled.

Eden laughed. "Building an army, I see. I won't tell Sandra."

"Building an army! Bwaak!" the parrot on the tiger's head squawked.

The monkey on the old man's shoulders ran back and forth as he stroked his beard. "Well, I have picked up certain habits in my lifetime."

Eden laughed as he didn't deny that one.

"Tell Silver Cross he's not a woman for me, please," Father Caleb said, moving to achingly sit down on the garden's bench.

"You heard that insanity as well?" Eden laughed.

"Yes, strangest results overheard yet," Father Caleb remarked. The old man offered the parrot to Eden as it was a bit bothersome. Why that was the case soon occurred.

"Caleb! Caleb! Bwaak!" the parrot squawked, flying to Eden's shoulder.

Eden laughed. "He seems fond of you."

"He's mocking me," the old man sighed.

"That's mocking?" Eden was confused. "Now the question becomes, should I call him Caleb?"

Eden laughed once more. The old man chuckled at this.

As Violet reentered Queen Lani's room, she found that the late queen was joined by two others. Samael and Balthazar's daughter, Moon, had arrived to pay a visit. The young harpy girl was patting the queen's back.

"Hi, miss!" Moon waved.

"I thought on what you were asking of me, Violet Diamond. And figured that I, alone, would not be able to help you. So, I went to get some help," Queen Lani nodded lightly. "I...have not exercised that old Diamond magic in...quite some time."

"I'm a dark hare so I can't do light magic," Moon noted. "Even with mom's blood in me, I can't do it. But! Dad said I'm really good at magical control. It's why he lets me teach my little siblings. So, if I can help them, then I'll do whatever I can to assist you, too."

"As for me," Samael spoke, towering over the others with arms folded. "I can do light magic, but my power is raw and overwhelming at times. Without control, a hole would be blown in the ship and send the user to the ground below without hesitation."

"With the four of us together, I believe we can route out the spell you need," Queen Lani said with a gentle smile.

Violet waved to Moon with a soft smile, turning her eyes to Queen Lani and Samael. "That's a splendid idea. Because, in all honesty, the pieces to the proposed theory in my mind consists of barrier and light magic coupled with magical control."

"Yes, I figured as much. With our powers combined...I know we can accomplish this complex spell," Queen Lani nodded.

"Oh, man! And I'll have a new spell to tell daddy about later," Moon nodded.

Jillian, who was now behind Violet with bonelike spider legs extended, nodded lightly. "Sure, he'll like to hear that one."

"I'm ready and willing, gentlemen and ladies. I will put everything into this to ensure a future remains for the Golden Empire. Or die trying." Violet gave a nod of her head then squealed noticing Jillian was behind her.

"Let's begin. A Diamond doesn't hesitate in their studies," Queen Lani spoke in a stern tone Violet hadn't heard before. The tailor looked forward to the others once more, ready to strengthen herself no matter what.

The tailor was bleeding and sweating profusely with the late queen's room in shambles. The young harpy girl had fled from the room for her safety. Moon was holding one arm, panting heavily. Samael shrugged off the pain but was panting quite heavily with blood dripping down his side. Queen Lani was on the ground barely able to move. Her hands began to glow as she performed a healing spell over the four of them.

Violet went to each of the three, checking on them. "...I...probably should had brought Claire..."

"In hindsight...yes," Queen Lani nodded lightly on the ground.

"Queen, Lani. I have a question," Violet spoke once taking a breath.

"Yes, dear?" the late queen asked.

"I do not wish to open old wounds but...I was wondering...do you have any books written by Alecta Diamond?" Violet asked, twiddling her thumbs.

"Alecta..." Lani said lightly. "That's a name I haven't...heard of in quite some time from another..."

"I apologize if it brings back hurtful memories," Violet rubbed the back of her neck, helping the late queen up on her feet.

"I was weak in many ways," Queen Lani said lightly. "Because of that weakness, my dearest friend betrayed me. I...never really recovered after that...It was difficult to trust anyone. I thought if I made myself strong and pushed back, it'd make me look more fearsome. But in the end, I simply lost everyone...and my nation."

"I understand, darling. Truly I do, having seen the memories. Hmm, have you been out and about in the airship lately? There's plenty of others to meet on here," Violet softly smiled.

"I have been, yes," Queen Lani smiled gently. "As for the books...what reason would you need a book from Alecta, anyway?"

"Oh, to look more into her theories of trans dimensional teleportation," Violet noted.

"Hmm..." Queen Lani moved to the side and looked to her bookshelf. Despite the room being in the shambles, the books appeared perfectly preserved. She offered the books to the tailor. "I haven't touched them in some time. I treasure them but haven't the will to read them. If any are of help to you, by all means take them."

Violet graciously accepted the offered books. "Thank you, Queen Lani. This is most appreciated. I will make sure to return them in the state in which they were given. If I were to suggest something, head to the kitchen and seek out the pink-haired chef. She makes the most interesting food."

"I will take that advice," Queen Lani nodded gently. "Although, I may have seen/eaten some of the food you described."

Moon stretched. "Well, I'm off to pass out. Hope I was helpful."

Samael moved to Violet. "See you around, love."

As Violet bid the two farewell, she heard the sounds of another airship closing in. She thanked Queen Lani for her assistance and rushed from the room.

“Violet,” Eve’s voice came over the airship’s intercom. “The royal airship of the empire is coming to escort us to the capital. I thought you’d like to know we will likely be at the capital very shortly.”

Violet rushed back to the airship’s bridge, out of breath, both hands on her knees. She overheard the navigational officers promoting Eve to captain of the airship and demoting Sandra to vice-captain after three debates were failed. The engineer groaned at the loss in the debates, but the navigational officers knew that Eve withheld future guidance for the airship’s growth beyond engineering.

“Oh well, that frees up my time to get more into projects,” Sandra shrugged.

Eve turned her gaze to Violet’s entrance. “Sister, we’re getting a call now. I’ll put it on screen.”

“Okay...I’m ready.” Violet brushed herself off, trying to get composed for the call.

The communication screen turned on and Luis appeared. “A pleasure to see you again, miss Violet.”

“Oh, hello, Mr. Salvana. How are you?” Violet asked.

“Very good,” Luis nodded. “Although, we’ve gotten reports of an explosion coming from the direction you were coming from.”

“The truth on that matter is that we were heading out to stop Maximillion’s brainwashing of harpy children. Then Silver Cross showed up, destroying the entire mountain trying to get rid of evidence,” Violet admitted.

“A lot happens around you, doesn’t it?” Luis blinked. “That would explain the follow up explosions to the southwest.”

“Yes, and that’s why a Mezmarian news helicopter is following us trying to besmirch me even further. Anywho, how is your day?” Violet smiled.

“Good for the moment. However, I feel that it will get worse in time,” the griffon nodded, noticing the helicopter out his airship’s window. “My ship, which will not be named, will escort yours to the capital now. Do not worry. The barrier around the capital will stop your unwanted escort from following us.”

“Right then, please lead the way,” Violet softly smiled. Lunio sniffed his way to the tailor, standing next to her.

“Follow us, then,” Luis smiled.

Violet asked Eve, vice-captain Sandra, and the navigational officers to follow Luis's ship.

Eve nodded. “As Violet said, follow that ship to our destination.”

The navigational officers nodded, and the group's airship started following Luis's with the news helicopter right behind. A barrier of light seemed to pass over everyone aboard the ship as the group were allowed to enter the city. The helicopter was barred entry, veering away but remained as near as it could. The group could see a glistening city outstretched before them on the side of a mountain. The barrier had hidden the city from view. Claire found it impressive. Violet looked on with great interest. The busy everyday life of a city played out below the group. The airship they were following headed to a ship docking station layered with gold and pure white designs.

Once arriving at the empire's ship docking station, group members departed and were escorted by Luis, the nurse harpy, and his guards. "I hope the sights here are to your liking."

"It's magical," Chester nodded, ears flopping.

"I am glad to hear that, little guy," Luis said. "The emperor is very excited to meet you all."

"So, you're the emperor's right hand, huh?" Violet tilted her head.

"Yes, I am," Luis nodded. "I have been in my lord's service since I was but a child."

"Same for the left hand, too?" Violet asked.

"Possibly," Luis chuckled.

The small group was led through the main street of the empire. There were all sorts in the streets from humans to griffons, young harpies, and even a few animalia.

"Quite a diverse population here," Violet marveled.

"All scumbags! Bah!" Virtuous waved his hand dismissively. Eden laughed at the mimic's comment.

"Scum bags?" The harpy nurse blinked.

"In the Golden Empire, you are not judged by race or species," Luis nodded.

"Yes, bags of scum. Scumbags," Virtuous grinned. "I judge every mortal equally."

"I like that notion. Not Virtuous's. Yours Luis," Violet softly smiled. "A place where one isn't judged too harshly."

"Scumbags! Bwaak!" Eden's parrot flapped its wings on the woman's shoulder making its presence known to the others.

The harpy nurse tilted her head. "Um, alrighty then."

Luis nodded. "The Emperor of the Golden Empire came to this land many years ago. People should live not by the fear of gods or by a weak-minded nobility but by the strength of arms. So, in this land, everyone is equal."

"Did the emperor, by chance, come from the Dragonlands?" Violet asked curiously.

"He did. The Dragonlands have been closed off to the world for some time. I like to think the emperor came to these lands mostly out of curiosity or even boredom," Luis remarked.

"Well, I like his ideals so far," Violet softly smiled.

"I'm glad you do, miss Violet," Luis said as he led the group towards the large castle at the center of the city. There was a wall surrounding the castle with sentries set up along the top. There were statues of dragons along the top, too, with hedges shaped like various people. Statues were also present in the inner courtyard garden past the guard wall.

"Didn't know the dragon knew interior decorating to such a degree," Violet pondered.

"He's been around quite some time," Luis chuckled.

The two main doors to the castle towered above the group in their height. There was a mechanism needed to open the doors as they were too heavy to open by hand.

"You must be *that* tall to go into this castle!" Virtuous raised his arm as high as he could on the door's frame. "This ride ain't for everybody!"

"Wouldn't this trap somebody inside?" Violet wondered. Eden found it odd they made a door they couldn't manually open, too.

"Well, trapping themselves in with a peeved dragon may not be the best of ideas. We do have other entrances, however. This one's just for flair," Luis winked.

"For flair? It's more like compensating to me in all honesty," Violet noted.

"You were gushing about the design two seconds ago, though," Eden tilted her head.

"One shouldn't get so caught up on things," Luis nodded.

"Yeah! Contradicting yourself, huh, evil Queen Violet?!" Virtuous wanted to high five Eden. Eden wasn't sure why the mimic was going for that but high fived him.

"...I suppose I did compliment it earlier so a bit rude to say things like that..." Violet admitted.

"Think nothing of it," Luis shrugged. "Come now. Let us have an audience with the emperor."

Violet brushed herself off to be ready for it. The group members were led inside. Passing through a short hallway, the group members were greeted with an audience chamber larger and taller than any they'd ever been to before. There were royal aerial guards stationed around. But, at the center of the room, laying atop a large throne, was a large black-scaled dragon. The tailor was amazed by this sight. Chester didn't want to be eaten and so hid underneath Vivian's hair. Vivian really hoped this dragon didn't immediately attack them or somehow turn to ice or water.

"Presenting his highness, Lord Nyx Delrose Elffire, Emperor of the Golden Empire!" Luis declared with flair.

Violet took a bow. The black-scaled dragon slowly rose up, looking over the group. He stretched a little as he got comfy in his throne. "Welcome, one and all. You'll have to forgive me. I was resting a bit. Didn't know exactly when you'd be arriving."

The Golden Emperor's voice was much softer than expected.

"We like to arrive prompt and early, Lord Nyx," Violet softly smiled.

"I can see that," Lord Nyx remarked, snorting black smoke. "You're right proper, it'd seem. What I can help you with, Miss Violet Diamond of Mezmaria?"

"I will get to the point right away. Silver Cross of Puregloss is partly leading the Rebellion with assistance from Maximillion and others. Silver was known to be the Man of Light for various reasons and has now gained deity-level abilities. When they head in the direction of the Golden Empire's capital, this barrier, this castle, it might not hold. If it does not, there won't be anything left of it, I guarantee it. To prevent this from occurring, I would like to lend our hand in defending the empire, at least for the moment," Violet offered.

Lord Nyx, the nation's emperor, listened to this. Black smoke came from his nostrils before the dragon spoke once more. "I'd heard that Puregloss had sided with the Rebellion, but I didn't want to jump to conclusions. All's said...the world doesn't take kindly to the Golden Empire. One wrong step, and the whole lot will be at my doorstep before long."

"Are you saying the other nations are at odds with the Golden Empire?" Violet asked curiously.

"No, but with the reputation the empire has on this continent, the other nations would likely jump in to help the Rebellion. Rumors have been floating around about potential 'heroic' deeds in fighting a corrupt and evil dragon. From my angle, Miss Violet, who would you side with in knowing that sort of information?"

"That's understandable, darling. My own country declares me an evil treasonous lady every day," Violet softly smiled. "I certainly know the effects of rumors."

"I know. Watched you on the television a bit ago. Strange things you been doing, huh?" Lord Nyx looked at the tailor curiously.

"On most occasions, I don't do strange things, darling. Strange things are done to me...Wait, that doesn't sound right..." Violet blinked thinking it over. Eden laughed at the tailor making it sound weird. Vivian tilted her head slowly. Eve looked at her sister strangely. Lunio liked where this was going.

"The world is strange at times. People can take words or actions in ways we didn't want them to," the dragon remarked.

"I'm not even worried about that anymore once I get past Mezmaria's current state to a more amicable one," Violet mentioned, placing both hands on her hips. "I—we—need this life to be peacefully livable for our friends and family, young and old, now and in the future. Sustainable and not worried about what's going to happen."

"I can understand that one," Lord Nyx agreed. "The future is the most important thing. It's what I've always inspired to improve."

"Well, you and I are now at odds with beings wielding great power. It will be through our strength that we overcome the coming rebel attack. Not some higher power alien to our own realm," Violet proudly stated.

"Right," Lord Nyx agreed once more. "Relying on higher beings only brings a dependency on them."

"Do you then agree that, for the moment, our assistance is accepted, even if being an outside influence?" Violet asked. "To stop the Puregloss involvement?"

"Only fair, I'd say. All's said...the Rebellion moved towards the option first, yeah?" Lord Nyx remarked.

"That they did," Violet nodded. "The plan of action I see happening is that our airship will assist in fighting the Rebellion's aerial frontline. We will station ourselves—this group standing before you—at the Mother Springs as the origin of Vastria's flowing waters would be an ideal location for Silver Cross to announce his takeover of the Golden Empire. We'll perform a surprise of our own on him."

"The Mother Springs would most certainly be ideal for that action." Lord Nyx found the plan of action agreeable on the tailor's part. "You thought this up nice and quick."

"I make certain plans ahead of time, darling," Violet softly smiled. "I'd like to say a word of caution, though. Do *not* engage Silver Cross in conflict. No one in the Golden Empire's military should engage the Man of Light. I cannot stress that enough. In our prior time spent in Filltroske, we learned to murder quite well. And keep from dying in attempts made on us. As the Man of Light, he will be on a 'holy mission' full of violence. Do *not* engage him with your forces as much as possible. We will take him on. Our group has the best chance of taking him down."

"A fearsome foe by the sounds of it." Lord Nyx raised a claw to his chin. "Sounds like an ally you had at a time, but no more."

"He was—and is—still a friend. Just disillusioned and lost, trying to find meaning to a life he'd not known long enough to have mature thoughts on," Violet admitted.

"Silvie is cute," Sunny cooed.

"Silver is a scumbag," Virtuous folded his arms.

"I still don't understand how he came into existence." Buddy rubbed the back of his neck.

"A friend is not one to fight. Bad blood only begets more. Are you sure you want to fight this man?" Lord Nyx asked the tailor with a serious tone.

"We have to, or he'll kill everyone that even slightly disagrees with him," Violet remarked.

"I see. A man so broken he slays any that don't see his way. A sad state for sure," Lord Nyx nodded lightly. "Miss Diamond of Mezmaria, I humbly ask for your assistance."

"For the prosperity of the Golden Empire, our assistance in this matter is aptly given," Violet spoke, bowing again.

The dragon stretched his wings out before folding them back to his side. The Golden Emperor placed both front claws together making them glow slightly. Before the group's eyes, the dragon began to shrink in size and change shape. A young man sat in the dragon's place. He wore a regal suit with a cape behind him. "You must be famished. You and your group are welcome to stay for the time being in my home. And, as such, I think a meal is in order. Well, shall we then? I can't stay too long in this form but plenty of time to have meal with guests."

Lunio pouted slightly as another dragon was good looking. Violet found the young man to be handsome. "The offer of a meal is greatly appreciated, darling. But let's save it for when victory is achieved."

"Understandable," Lord Nyx said with a nod of his head, taking a step from the throne with cape flowing behind the sizable man. "Tell me, miss Diamond, if you would. The empire of the sun is a place that welcomes all. Would you be against taking up residence in my nation? A woman as strong and cunning as you would fit in well. Strength is a trait I admire most. Strength of arm and mind. And from what I've seen from afar, you certainly have both."

"I wouldn't mind as a concept, but my residence is in Vanillaville with family, darling," Violet noted.

"Family is an important thing. I haven't been back to my home in many a moon. Much as I'd like to, can't rightly go back with the Rebellion always a few steps away," Lord Nyx remarked, folding both large arms.

"Do you still stay in contact at least?" Violet asked.

"The Dragonlands are an isolated one," Nyx said lightly. "There is no need to stay in contact as that isolation is known for wandering dragons much like me."

"Afraid that I don't know the current state of the Dragonlands, aside from old memories. Didn't know that was the common way of it," Violet noted.

Lord Nyx snorted with black smoke from his nostrils. "I learned much when I was just a lad there. Wanted to see the world. Ended up finding a nation on the brink of decimation. Fate is a funny thing, isn't it?"

"It is, but it led you to where you're needed," Violet softly smiled.

"So it did," Lord Nyx agreed.

"I have a question. Who's your left hand if Luis is the right?" Violet asked with curiosity.

"My war general. A woman of strength and grace," Lord Nyx nodded lightly with arms folded.

"Ooh, that sounds delightful," Violet smiled.

"Eden has more strength and grace! Dare I say, beauty and love, too!" Virtuous declared. Eden had her head in both hands as Virtuous decided to yell that.

"A battle shall be set then," Lord Nyx nodded. "A fight between my war general and your Eden."

"No, no. No need," Violet waved her arms then jabbed the mimic in his chest. "Virtuous, stop it."

With that, the Golden Emperor's war general was called for. After several minutes of waiting, a young harpy woman arrived. The harpy's wings were folded behind her back as she strolled in. "You called, your highness?"

"This here is my most trusted war general." Lord Nyx motioned to the harpy for the group's attention. Each person greeted the harpy, and she did the same. "With that out of the way, I've got to take a rest before my form shifts back. I bid you all a good day and will see you very soon. If you are in need of my ear, please let Luis know to contact me."

Violet nodded, offering another bow.

"We have a spare room for you all. Believe me when I say it. The room is much larger than it would appear," Luis nodded.

"Rather sure we've all been resting quite a bit on the airship. Need to get over to the Mother Spring before Silver Cross arrives for some preparation," Violet noted.

"No rest for the night?" Luis asked, bit confused. "If that is the case, we should go and tell his highness this before you leave."

"Oh, I don't know how much time we have left. But if we run out of it, Silver won't have mercy. He's already nearly killed some of us in that last encounter," Violet remarked to Luis. "I mean, yes, if it helps that he knows, then do so. But we're going to be on our own in the coming fight with Silver Cross. Best to have it that way. "

Luis nodded gently. "I see. That makes quite a bit of sense. Then I will tell him of your leaving. Please be safe. When this is over, I know the Golden Emperor will want to hear of your stories."

"Yes...stories. If wanting to relive the trauma I suppose..." Violet spoke in an awkward tone.

"... I'm guessing he means about the fight," Eden noted.

"I meant of victory but, um, I didn't mean to open a wound," Luis grimaced.

"Silver is a good guy. Even if we win, this won't be a good outcome. And what I plan to do in getting him closer isn't that great. He's going to hate us—and me—for it," Violet spoke softly. "Imagine you were born yesterday with the innocent intentions of a child to make right the violence, death, and murder all around you. You've gone through nothing but tribulations with only faith guiding you forward. But, in the end, the friends you made from childbirth are the enemies you'll fight to the death over that same faith. It's going to be bad, win or lose. Silver is a good guy. It shouldn't had come to this..."

Vivian could kinda imagine that one after hearing it.

"Forgive my prior words. This is not a situation I would have anyone go through," Luis said softly. The griffon headed off to inform the emperor. Violet and the others awaited Luis to inform Lord Nyx of the departure. While he was gone, the tailor whispered to Virtuous and Sunny on what she wanted them to do. The two were disgusted, and it took coaxing to actually get them to agree.

Eden had no idea what it was Violet whispered to the two, but she was going to take that reaction as Virtuous's turn to do something stupid. But the mimic didn't do anything stupid this time around. He had a serious expression that was showcasing disgust and a bit of sadness. Mainly towards the sadness Sunny was expressing in Violet's plans whispered.

Luis bowed to the group when the griffon returned. "Is there anything that you need for this task? A nurse?"

"Claire is our nurse," Luminous flatly noted.

"We just need your defense to hold against the Rebellion," Violet remarked.

"We will hold out as long as possible. The Rebellion has not destroyed these walls after all these years. They will not this day, either," Luis stated with confidence.

"Well, I do admittedly adore the empire. Rather more straightforward than the cesspool that is the Mezmarian nobility," Violet remarked before starting to lead the others away.

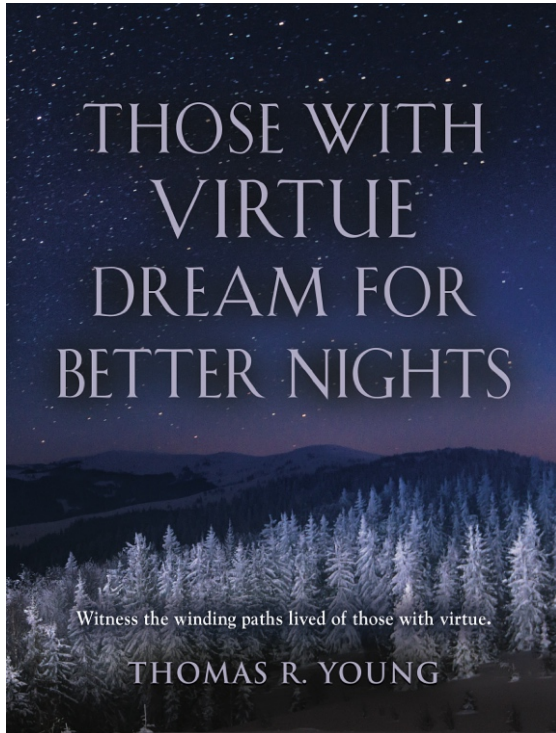
Luis and his guards escorted them back to their ship. Vivian and the others followed after Violet. Boarding the airship, flashes of light were seen in the distance amid the setting sun's horizon. A few moments passed after each with a thunderous roar and slight wind. Violet and the others, including Luis and his guard, stared a few moments where the flashes of light were seen with serious expressions written on their faces.

“Well, uh, good luck out there,” Luis remarked to Violet and the others. The tailor nodded and the group finished boarding the airship.

Violet informed Sandra, Eve, and the navigational officers that the Mother Springs were at the highest peak right above the Golden Empire, overlooking it with grandeur of its own. A mountainous water collective, massive in its own right, like a small sea atop the highest peak that one could sail across. Water pristine and clear from rain collected over many generations, trickling down to the rest of the nation. Fresh water, and its source, evenly distributing hydration to all of Vastria. The source of the continent’s fresh water, the beautiful Mother Springs.

"That's so pretty~" Megan marveled, observing the pure water.

“It was said to have been a gift of the ‘true’ Lihara long ago,” Violet remarked. “This country speaks of and desires Lihara so much that it forgets the simplest and most true gifts of life. Untainted, the Mother Springs, still reveal their truth from above, if only others would appreciate its peaceful simplicity. What better ‘true’ Lihara is there than that?”



A continuation into the stories pertaining to Those With Virtue with Violet Diamond and others she holds dear.

Those With Virtue Dream For Better Nights

By Thomas R. Young

Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/13144.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**