

Ryber Fortiza

Y18 D122

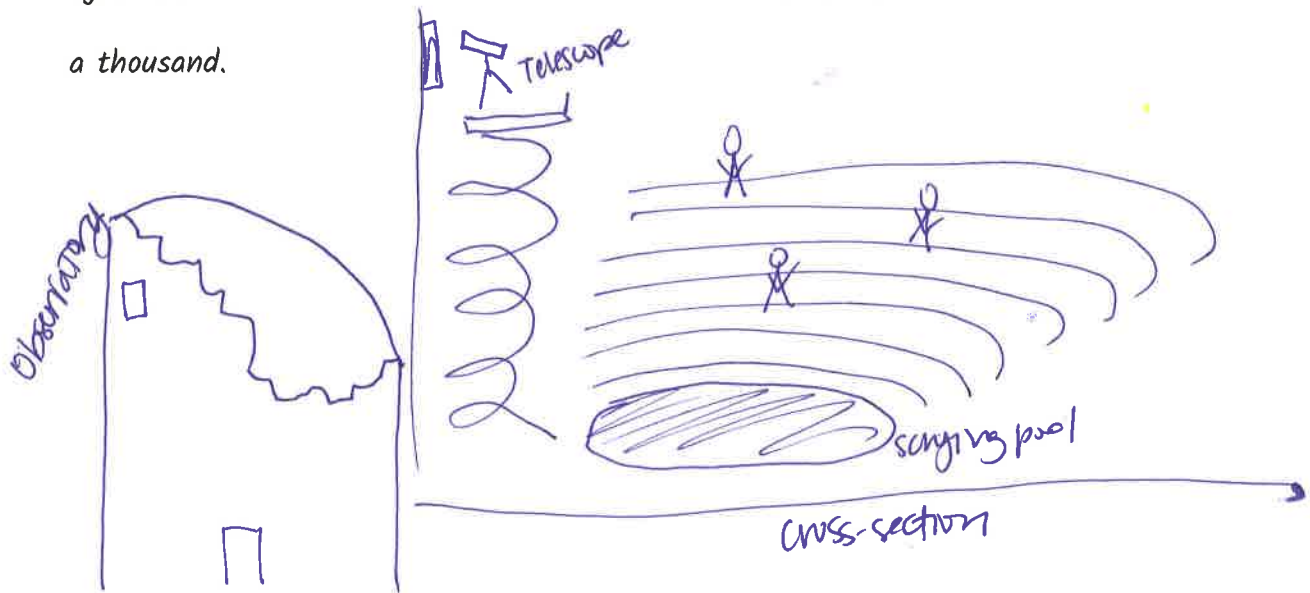
MEMORIES

Tanzi was summoned today.

It happened, like it always does: we were at morning prayer in the observatory, hunched in our seats with eyes closed. I was sitting with the other Serving Sisters, a swathe of brown through the hall of silver Sighthwitches.

Clouds had gathered overnight. They cast a flimsy light through the stained glass faces in the observatory's ceiling.

We had just begun the Memory Vow, Hilga standing beside the round hole at the room's heart—just as she always does with her hands clasped at her belly, her eyes closed. Our voices bounced on the marble walls, eighty-seven throats sounding like a thousand.



As the final words in the Memory Vow—"Once seen, never forgotten. Once heard, never lost"—crossed our lips, a telltale flap of wings echoed out.

My heart dropped to my toes.
Like it always does when I hear that
sound, yet somehow even harder than
usual.

Please be for me, I begged,
staring at the stained glass dome
overhead—at Sirmaya's brown bear
form in the center, curled up in
endless hibernation. Please be coming
for me, Sleeper. I follow all the rules,
I've learned all my lessons, and I have
served you without complaint for
thirteen years. Please, Sirmaya,
summon me.

I wanted to vomit. I wanted to
shout. Surely, surely my day had
finally come.

Then the spirit swift appeared,
swirling out of the scrying pool. A
black mist that coalesced into a
sharp-tailed, graceful-winged figure,
its feathers speckled with starlight. It
circled once, with eyes that glowed
golden, and a musty, familiar smell

PRAYERS OF THE SIGHTWITCH SISTER

The Memory Vow

IN THE NAME OF SIRMAYA,
I VOW TO PRESERVE
ALL THAT HAS COME BEFORE,
FOR THE PAST IS THE ONLY TRUTH,
ONCE SEEN, NEVER FORGOTTEN,
ONCE HEARD, NEVER LOST.

The Vow of Clear Eyes

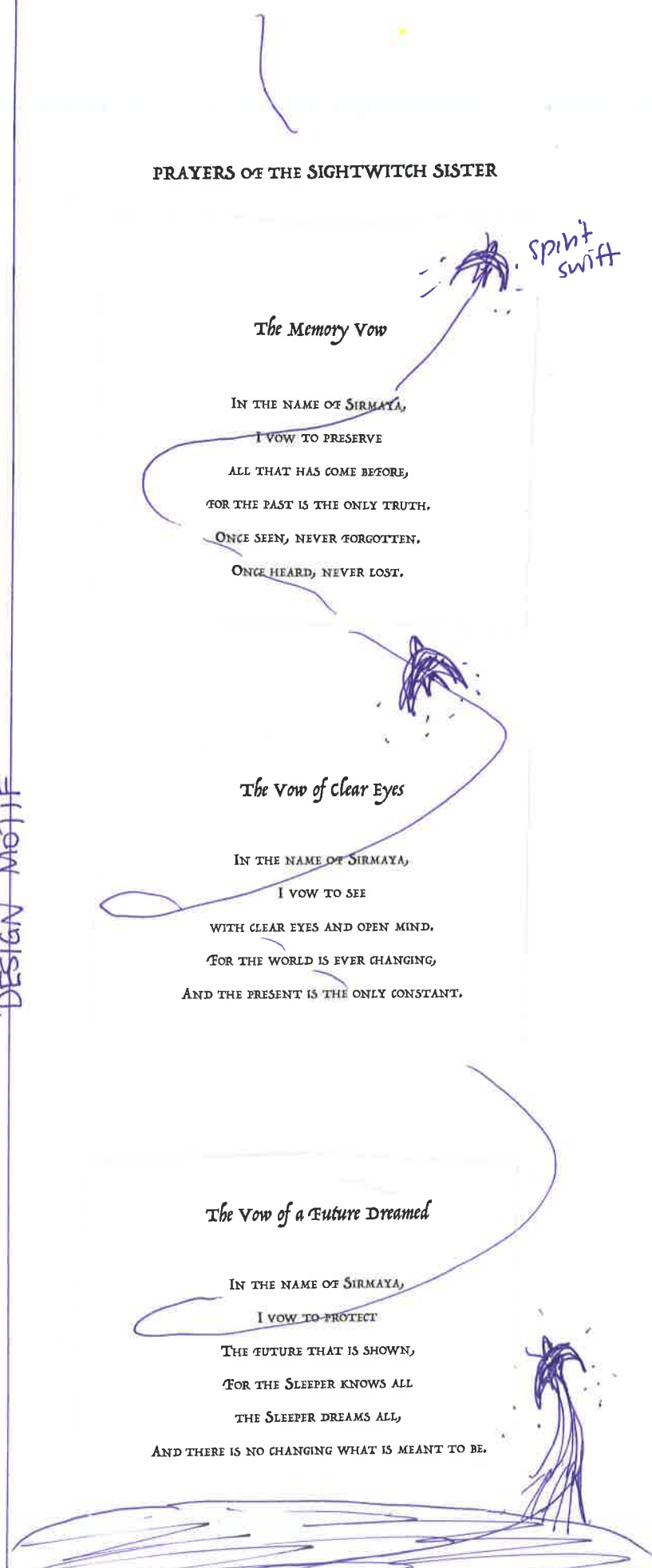
IN THE NAME OF SIRMAYA,
I VOW TO SEE
WITH CLEAR EYES AND OPEN MIND,
FOR THE WORLD IS EVER CHANGING,
AND THE PRESENT IS THE ONLY CONSTANT.

The Vow of a Future Dreamed

IN THE NAME OF SIRMAYA,
I VOW TO PROTECT
THE FUTURE THAT IS SHOWN,
FOR THE SLEEPER KNOWS ALL
THE SLEEPER DREAMS ALL,
AND THERE IS NO CHANGING WHAT IS MEANT TO BE.

DESIGN MOTIF

spirit
swift



wafted over me.

That smell meant a Summoning.

Pick me, I prayed, the tips of my fingers numb from clutching so tightly at my gown. Pick me, pick me—

The spirit rook dropped closer to land before the Serving Sisters, fourteen of us in brown. I swayed. My heart surged into my throat.

Two hops. It was almost to me, if aiming slightly more toward Tanzi. But there was still a chance it might change course. Still a chance it might twist back over to me...

It didn't. It skipped over to Tanzi's toes instead. Because of course, the swift could not be here for me.

They are never here for me.

Seventeen years old, and my eyes are still the color of mud. Thirteen years at the Convent, and I'm still consigned to brown cotton.

Somehow, though, I managed to keep my throat from screaming, No! I wanted to shriek—Sirmaya knows I wanted to shriek it and that my eyes burned with tears. It wasn't Tanzi's fault, though, that the goddess had picked her first.

And it wasn't Tanzi's fault that Sirmaya doesn't seem to want me at all.

So I didn't cry and I didn't scream. Instead, I forced a smile onto my lips and gave Tanzi a hug. She was looking so worried, I couldn't not offer Threadsisister something. Her thick eyebrows had drawn into a single black line. Her russet brown skin was all pinched with worry and guilt—an expression I never wanted to see on my her face. If smiling would ease it, then smiling I could do.

"One of our ranks has been summoned," Sister Hilga intoned. The words she

always said; words that were never spoken for me. "Praise be to Sirmaya."

"Praise be to Sirmaya," the sisters murmured back. Except for me. Tanzi still hugged me so tight, so fierce.

So afraid.

"I'll be waiting for you," I said before she pulled away. Hilga was already walking toward us, the Summoning Bell pulled from her belt. "And I'll water your violets."

"Unless you get summoned too," Tanzi whispered.

"Yes." I held my smile as stiff as the faces in the stained glass. "Unless I get summoned too."

Empty words made of dust. We both knew it would never happen. Sisters rarely get summoned at the same time, and with each day that passes, the less I think I will ever get called inside the mountain to face the goddess. To earn the gift of Sight.

Then that was it. That was all Tanzi and I got for a goodbye before my Threadsisiter was tugged onward and the rest of us were assembling into rows of three. Twenty-nine rows of sisters...

And finally me, last and alone, for eighty-five does not break evenly.

Hilga rang the bell once, and its bright twinkle filled the observatory. Filled my ears, then hooked deep into my heart and yanked down.

I hate the sound of that bell even more than the deeper bell that follows. The one in the belfry above the Crypt Chapel.

At the sound of the main bell's single toll, we walked.

Little Trina, who is at least two hands shorter than I am, glanced back at me with a pitying expression to cloud her eyes. Or maybe it wasn't pity, but rather fear

that she'd one day end up like me: seventeen and still mud-eyed. Seventeen and still dressed in brown.

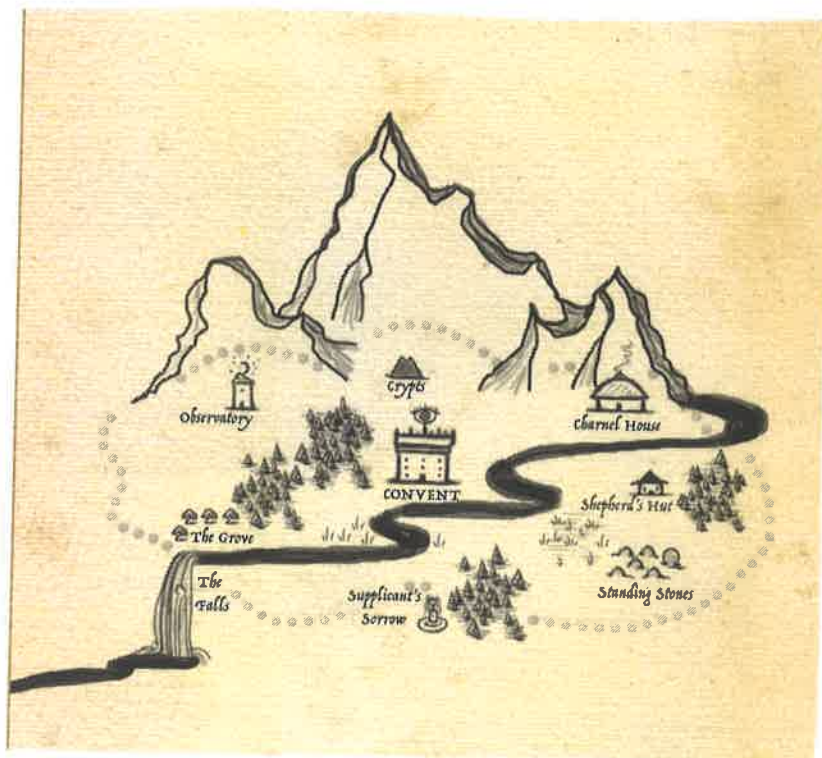
Seventeen and still un-Summoned by our sleeping goddess, Sirmaya.

I pretended not to see Trina staring, and when we began the Chant of Sending, I hummed the hollow tones louder than I had ever hummed before. I wanted Tanzi to hear me, all the way at the front of the line as we wound out of the observatory and up the trail.

Two of the Serving Sisters had cleared this path last week, but already white rubble clotted the pine-needle path. It shed from the mountain each time she shakes herself.

I will have to clean it again tomorrow—just you wait. Hilga will come to me in the morning with that chore.

Except this time, there will be no Tanzi to help.



(Not final →
I've moved
things around
-S.)

When at last we reached the chapel pressed against the mountain's white face, the chant came to an end. Always the same rhythm; always the same timing.

We all stopped there, at the entrance into the Sightwitch Sister's vast underground library. The chant was over but its memory still hung in the air around us as we fanned into half-circles around the arched entrance.

The swift that had summoned Tanzi swooped over us now, briefly multiplying into three spirit swifts. Then six. Then shrinking back into one before sailing through the open door.

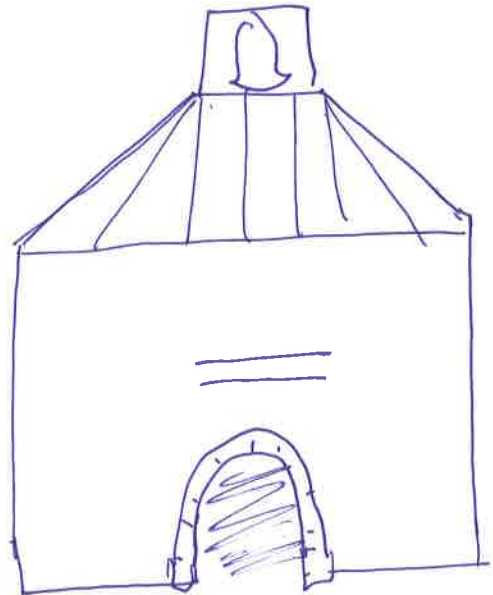
When it had disappeared from sight, Hilga nodded at Tanzi. "From this day on, Tanzi Lamanaya will be no more. She will return as a Serving Sister. Soon, she will return with the Gift of Clear Eyes."

"Praise be to the Sleeper," we all murmured back—even me, though it made my stomach hurt to say it.

Tanzi smiled then. A brilliant, giddy one with no sign of her earlier fret.

And who could blame her? Certainly not me. She'd been summoned by the Sleeper. The most important moment in the life of a Sightwitch Sister. The only moment, really, that matters to any of us.

I tried to mimic her grin. Tried to show Tanzi that I was happy for her—because I was. A person can grieve for themselves, yet still revel in someone else's good fortune.



Our mud-eyes barely had time to connect before Hilga gripped Tanzi's shoulder and turned her firmly away.

They walked, Tanzi and Hilga, step by measured step into the chapel. Into the mountain. Soon enough, they were lost to the shadows, and the line of Sisters was reforming.

The next time I would see Tanzi, her eyes would no longer match mine.

The other sisters turned away then and marched back to the observatory.

I lingered behind, my gaze trapped on the words etched into the marble above the chapel entrance.

TWO OR MORE AT ALL TIMES,

FOR A LONE SISTER IS LOST.

We call it the Order of Two, and no matter your heritage, the letters shift and melt into whatever language you find easiest to read.

For me, that is Cartorran. I left Illrya too young to ever learn its written language.

The letters over the chapel were bewitched by a Wordwitch centuries ago, and I cannot help but wonder, every time I see them—even today, after my Threadsister had left me for Sirmaya—What do those words look like for someone who cannot read?

I shook my head. A useless question, and one that left me running to catch back up to the group.

The rest of my day unfolded in miserable silence. At least for me, without Tanzi

there to talk to.

Her half of the bed is cold now. Only without her here do I realize how used to her presence I am. Her sideways snorts when she thinks something's funny. Her constant cracking of her knuckles while she talks. Or even how she breathes heavy in her sleep, not quite a snore, but a sound I'm so accustomed to.

I don't want to sleep. I don't want to wake up alone. And I don't want to wake up wondering, yet again, why, why, why I am still without the Sight.

Tanzi Lamanaya

Y10 D234

Today, I received a knife with an amber on the hilt. My mentor, Sister Hilga, told me it is the "Key to the past" and that I must not lose it. She also gave me this diary and said to record all events of the day in here, including my lessons. Then, upon waking, I must record all of my dreams.

I hope I can remember my dreams. I've never remembered them before.

Today, I learned the hierarchy of the Sighwitch Sisters. I don't think I'll forget the three kinds of sisters, seeing as I live here now and will be seeing them every day, but I also do not want to disobey my mentor. Especially since my roommate, a girl named Ryber Fortiza, has now snapped at me twice for not following the rules

Ryber is from Illrya, and she's just like Gran-Mi always said the Illryans were: her tongue is razor-edged, her manner hurried and hard.

"Your bed is not made right," Ryber scolded earlier. Then just a few moments later, she barked, "Do not dawdle, Tanzi! The lanterns are snuffed at the twenty-first chimes, and lighting a candle after that would be breaking Rule 33!"

Ryber's frown is even fiercer than her tongue, the way her dark eyes narrow and her brow slops so low. Gran-Mi would say that she has a face

telling stories because it is so expressive.

I miss Gran-Mi. I hope I don't cry tonight. I don't think Ryber would like that.

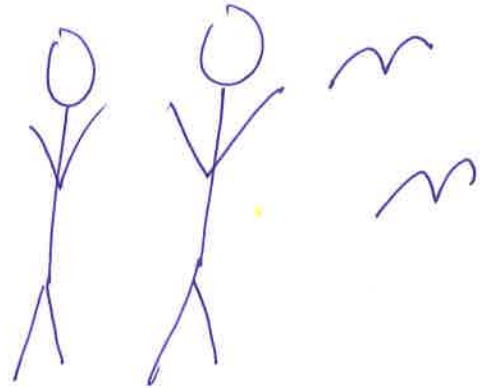
Oh no, Ryber is glaring at me again. I had better write what I remember

from my lessons.



also called mud-eyes!

Serving Sisters are acolytes at the Convent, they serve the sisters with Sight by helping to clean, cook, and garden.



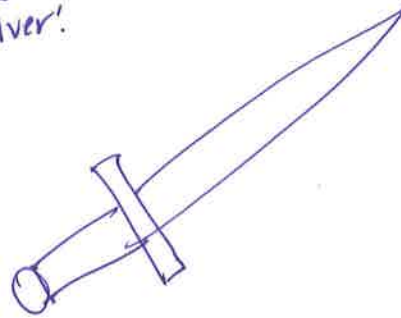
Summoned Sisters are acolytes who have been Summoned by Sirmaya to go into the mountain. For one day and one night, the sister is underground meeting the goddess, but I don't really know what that means.

No one knows, and they all say "you'll understand when you're Summoned." - I hate it.



← our eyes are silver!

This will be us one day!



Sightwitch Sisters have the Sight, meaning they can look at something once and remember it forever. They also can use their knives (like the knife Sister Hilga gave me) to remove memories from corpses. And, when they pray together, the Sisters can see visions in the scrying pool at the Observatory.

It is called a key!

Ryber drew the pictures for me and added the notes. She says it's better to have pictures in our diaries, but I can't draw.

"Not yet," Ryber told me, "but you'll learn." Then she read what I'd written about her above, and she laughed. A big sound. The kind Gran-Mi would've called "catching."

She is a lot less scary when she smiles.

"You can call me Ry," she said next. "And I'm sorry I nagged you. But Rule 8 says, 'Obedience is holy.' So you see? Only by following the rules will Sirmaya know which sisters are good enough for her to summon."

"Oh," I said, thinking back to the massive list of rules Hilga had showed me earlier.

It was a lot.

Ry seemed to know what I was thinking because she laughed again, and said, "Don't worry, Tanz. You have time to learn it all."

Then she smiled big, and I smiled back.

I like how she called me 'Tanz.'

Ryber Fortiza

Y18 D123 — 1 day since Tanzi was Summoned

DREAMS

I don't remember my dreams. As usual.

I do miss Tanzi, though. It's strange to wake up alone. Strange to record my dreams without hearing her quill scratch nearby. Strange to sit in this cold space with no one to ask, "Did you sleep well, Ry?"

Oh, it is true she will be back tonight, but her eyes will no longer be the dark brown of a Kritian. They will be silver.

She will be clear-eyed. A true Sightwitch Sister.

It is worse, though, knowing she will no longer be allowed to share a room with me. She will return from the mountain at the dolmen in the Grove, where all newly gifted Sisters arrive, and then she will move two stories above me in the Convent. She will have a new roommate, a new room, a new life.

Threadsisters no longer.

She will be kind to me. The new Sightwitch Sisters always are. But the chasm between us will be as wide as the mountain. As deep as the scrying pool from which the spirit swifts fly.

It happens this way every time. First there was Sister Margrette, then Sister Ute, then Lachmi, then Oriya. Fazimeh, Yenna, Birgit, Gaellan.

No doubt, I'm forgetting someone since I do not have the gift of Clear Eyes. Once seen, often forgotten. Once heard, usually lost.

MEMORIES

I wish I'd been the one summoned instead of Tanzi.

I hate myself for that.

And just as I predicted, I was charged with clearing the mountain paths today. Summer has fully awakened in the forest that hugs the slope. The weak, fighting buds of spring that I saw last are now full leaves. Green, green everywhere.

On a normal day, it would have made me feel better to be outside instead of cooped up in the kitchen. And on a normal day, Tanzi and I would have played the game we always play when no one's around to hear us.

"What happens inside the mountain?" I would ask. Then she'd chime back, "What happens during the Summoning?" For hours we would make guess after guess, each more absurd than the last.

I tried to play alone. To pretend today was no different than any other. To imagine what Tanzi might be doing right now. Yet it was a battle to come up with any clever answers—something as silly as what she might conjure. I gave up after only one try.

"Maybe Sirmaya is not even real," I mumbled, my arms full of fallen pine cones and branches. "Maybe there's just too much bat crap in the air, and it turns your eyes to silver."

The words tasted of ash. Especially because of part of me wished they could be true. No sleeping Goddess. Just bat crap and a spirit swift's random choice.

Ryber Fortiza

Y18 D124 — 2 days since Tanzi was Summoned

DREAMS

No dreams. No sleep.

Tanzi has not returned.

Hilga acts as if there is nothing to be alarmed by, but there is. There is. After a Summoning, a sister always returns on the eve of the following day.

Always.

But I waited in the Grove for her all night, and she never came. I sat right beside the dolmen, within view of the slab that will slide back once she has completed her Summoning.

Not once did the granite budge. Even Sister Ute and Sister Birgit, who sat gossiping beside the alders grew alarmed by dawn. Then Ute went off to find Hilga.

Soon after, the Head Sister joined us, her expression grim—though she tried to act relaxed, regularly slumping her shoulders and breathing deep.

I know her too well, though. I may not have the Sight, but Hilga was my mentoring Sister for the first six years I was here. Right up until she was named head of the Convent and then creaking old Sister Rose became my mentor instead.

Hilga is scared.

The four of us waited until the sun had fully risen.

But Tanzi never came.

So of course, I did not sleep and did not dream.

Where is Tanzi? What if she's hurt? And all alone with no one to help her?

There is no way to get inside the mountain, so I cannot find out. No one can find her.

Curse me. I must go to the observatory now. It is time for Morning Prayers.

Please, Sirmaya, please. Show us where Tanzi is in the scrying pool. Or better yet, summon me.

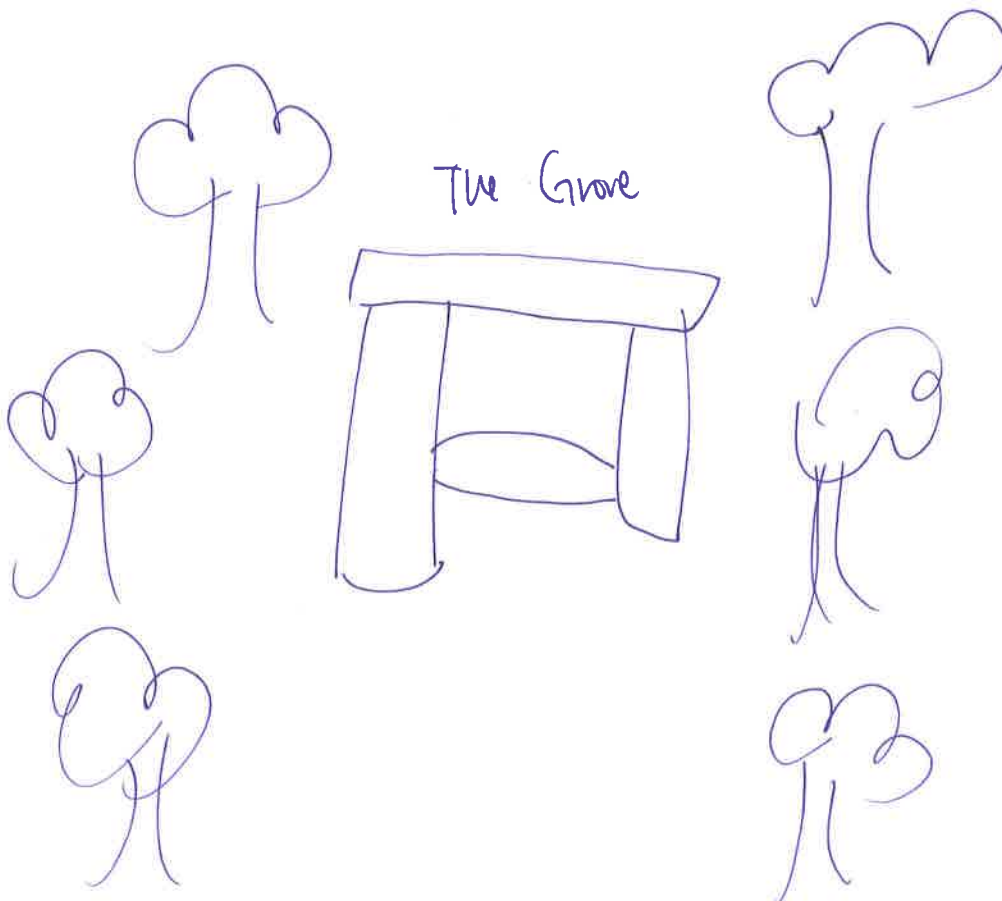
I beg you to. Please, I beg you.

MEMORIES

Trinam and Gaellan were summoned after the prayers today. No visions of Tanzi in the pool; just more spirit swifts.

Two of them for two Serving Sisters.

I don't understand.



Ryber Fortiza

Y18 D125 — 3 days since Tanzi was Summoned

DREAMS

No dreams and no sleep.

Tanzi still hasn't returned. Nor Trina, nor Gaellan.

MEMORIES

Three more Serving Sisters were summoned today.

What is happening? Why is Hilga acting so calm?

And why why why why why why why has no one returned from the Crypts?

I just want to know where Tanzi is. I just want to know that she's all right.

Sirmaya, I will give anything for my Threadsister's safe return. Please, please,
please, can you not answer me?

Ry and I cornered Hilga after the midday meal today. We went to her office in the top of the tower, where no one could hear.

Where Sister Rose couldn't here.

"Please," Ryber began before Hilga had even reached her chair. "Please be our mentor again. We know you have duties as Head Sister, but Rose is...she isn't..."

"She isn't very good," I said bluntly--exactly like Ry told me not to do. "She's ancient, Sister Hilga, and she--"

"She is the oldest Sister here," Hilga snapped, dropping emphatically onto her stiff-backed chair. She was wearing her You Annoy Me face. "Rose has more knowledge and experience than anyone else. You should be grateful she was willing to take over after me."

"But we want to learn more," Ry pleaded.

This was a half-lie since I had no interest in learning more--that was really only Ryber. But I was dreadful sick of Rose.

She means well. Sleeper knows she does, but her Sight overpowers her most days. Meaning she'll forget mid-sentence what she was teaching us, and no matter how much Ry and try to remind her, it's rare that she'll ever actually circle back to finish a lesson.

Instead she always feeds us the same phrase, "You'll understand once you're Summoned."



Hilga's
You Annoy
Me Face

It's so thrice-damned frustrating!

But my argument wasn't nearly as compelling as Ry's, so I let my Threadsister do the rest of the talking. She is the better orator, anyway, and also the more desperate party. Plus, the Rook was on his perch, and it had been a few weeks since I'd seem him last.

The Rook is my favorite person at the Convent aside from Ry. And no, he isn't a person, but he sure acts like one. I've never seen an animal that understands so much of what we say--much less insists we get his name right.

It's not Rook, but THE Rook. He'll bite you if you get it wrong.

"He belongs to the Convent," Rose said this very morning when he swooped in during breakfast. "He is as old as the Crypts and will outlive us all."

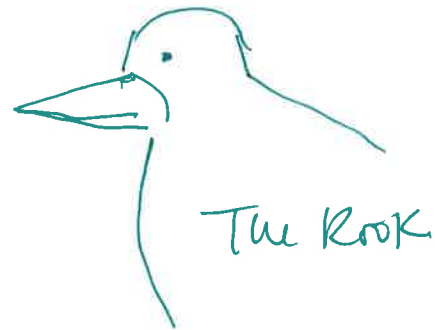
"How is that even possible?" Ry had demanded.

"You'll understand when you're summoned."

That had been the last and final grain of salt to flood the sea. Ryber grabbed my wrist, and I knew we were doing it. Finally, we were going to beg Sister Hilga for a new mentor.

After giving the Rook a few good scratches beside his beak (I love the way he purrs! Even the kitchen cat doesn't purr with this much satisfaction), I honed back in on the argument unfolding behind me.

"Surely," Ryber insisted, "not all questions must be answered by 'You'll understand when you're summoned!'" There must be something we can learn now, Sister Hilga. Fazimeh said she learned about the Standing Stones and the glamour spell yesterday. And Oriya said she learned about how the scrying pool



works.

"Tanzi and I are some of the oldest Serving Sisters here, yet we don't know anything about these pieces of Sightwitch lore. We are woefully behind, Hilga. Please."

It was an excellent speech. Not that I was surprised--Ry could convince ice to melt. Still, I had to fight the urge to break into applause.

As if sensing my delight, Ry glanced back at me with one of her sly half-smiles.

Her smile widened when Hilga huffed a harsh sigh of defeat.

"I suppose Rose is too old to be teaching."

"She is," I confirmed, scooting toward the desk.

"And I suppose, at your ages--how old are you now?"

"Fifteen," Ryber declared as I said, "Fourteen."

"Then yes, your educations should be further along," Hilga fixed us both with a wince. "Do you really not know how the glamour spell hides the Convent from the rest of the world? Or how its magic is bound to the Standing Stones?"

"No," we barked in unison.

Her wince deepened. "Then you indeed have much to catch up on. Here." She shoved out her chair, aiming for the wall of books behind the Rook. He fluttered with annoyance when she swept him aside to pull not one, not two, but three massive tomes off the shelf.

For half a breath, I regretted our decision to come here. MORE WORK was not really what I wanted.

But then I caught sight of the elation in Ryber's dark eyes. Her fingers were clutched at her heart, a sign she was itching to yank the books right of Hilga's hands.

"Read these," Hilga ordered, offering the books--which, as I'd guessed, Ryber snatched up.

She even gave a little squeal of delight.

"Then," once you've read them, I want you to come back to me for a list of subjects that you will be researching further in the Crypts."

I tried not to grimace.

I hate the Crypts.

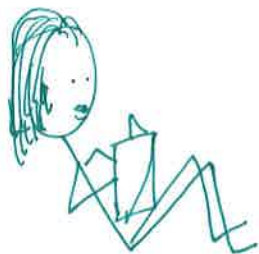
"You will continue to meet with Sister Rose each day," Hilga went on, "and then once a week with me. Do you understand?"

"Yes," I muttered, wondering how I was going to fit in time for my daily game of ring-ball with Birgit and Yenna. (Birgit has gotten very full of herself since she me beat me last week. It's intolerable.)

Meanwhile Ry bounced on her toes. So much excitement! "Thank you, Sister Hilga," she breathed. "Thank you so much!"

Then, as if she feared Hilga would change her mind, she grabbed my wrist and rushed out of the office.

Now, as I write this before bed, she sits curled up on her side of the bed reading about the scrying pool. Already, she's halfway through the massive book. --and already, she's made notes to summarize it all, since she knows I'll never crack open that ancient cover.



Ryber
reading in bed