

## RE: DEITY - THE BREATH OF CREATION

### 2.2 The Old Man and the Sea

Her name was Inesa, and her meeting with a crusty old fisherman changed her life. She met him on the docks of a small fishing village, the weathered old man mending a hole in his net with gnarled fingers, his progress slowed by arthritis and age, but still noticeable as the work of someone who had done such a task his entire life. The dock itself was long, the wood creaking underfoot as she settled herself beside the old man, who barely spared her a glance with his cloudy eyes before returning to his net.

His face was tan and weathered from a life at sea. His hair was grey and thinning, his Fae-horns worn by time and exposure. He sat, stooped over, his back bent by the weight of years, but his cloudy eyes still held a light of defiance to them. The kind of defiance that didn't banish fear, but denied its purchase in his soul. And she was afraid; afraid of herself, of her power, of what she could be, and of the path she may take. Of the attention placed upon her because of this. Perhaps that is why she was drawn to him.

Perhaps that is why he spoke to her.

They talked of all kinds of things, together, the old man mending his net and she kicking her legs over the dock, feet touching the salty water below as the light of the small planet's sun beat down upon them. And he told her all about life, something she knew nothing about.

She was a young goddess, after all, barely a century old. And he was an old soul.

"If ya want ta learn 'bout people," the old man drawled in a thick accent, fingers stilling for the first time as he looked up at her, a frown tugging at the corners of his lips. A chill wind blew across the sea, bringing with it the scent of salt and setting the old man to shivering. "Ya gotta take ah

look at their 'omes, an what kinda fire warms their hearths. That'll show ya what kinda 'eart they got, too."

"What do ya mean?" Inesa asked, having adopted the old man's dialect to better blend in with the local mortals. She couldn't say what possessed her to walk among the mortal peoples like this, suppressing her powers to such a degree and meandering about, but still she did. The old man shrugged.

"Mah 'ome is cold an empty. Always 'as been. Mah boat's a better 'ome than mah house's ever been." He said softly, sadly, shivering once again as his fingers resumed their work. "That'll tell ya what kinda life ah lived. Ah was born 'o the sea, an ah'll die out there."

Inesa took his words to heart, though she continued to talk to him until the grouchy old man grew tired of talking, and set out to sea, alone, with nothing but his net, a boat, and a small fishing rod. She didn't follow him, not at first. Instead she wandered the village, hiding herself from mortal eyes as she peered into the homes of all those present. The old man's home was just as he said; cold and empty, dark, devoid of any sort of light. Fishing supplies were scattered about the small hut, and his bed looked like it hadn't been slept in, in years. She could almost see the light of what had once been a candle sitting on the windowsill, but such a feeling vanished like a whistle in the wind.

Other homes were warm and full of life. Light from roaring fireplaces filled the dining rooms, the happy squeals of children filling the halls. Candles were lit in the dark, when the light of the sun and the Lunar Star was dim, burning like stars in the night sky. And she wandered, and observed, and came to know that the old man whose name she did not know was right. To someone like her it was easy to know what kind of a life someone had lived from what kind of light filled their home.

Sometimes large homes were filled with warmth and happy people. Sometimes they were large, but empty, the light a pale imitation of a happy hearthfire. Sometimes small homes were devoid of any sort of light, the gathering place of the hopeless, who huddled around fireplaces like it was a dying dream, desperate to bask in the last of its warmth. And sometimes those small homes were cozy and warm, filled with more love than could fit in four small walls.

It only took four months for her to begin to learn this. In those four months, her fears largely melted away, replaced by simple desires and a firm declaration that echoed in her heart, and soothed the fear of what could be. And she returned to the old man to talk to him some more. To thank him for what he did and said, even if he didn't realize his words would have such a profound effect upon her.

She found his body at the bottom of the sea, his soul long since departed. Fish pecked at his bloated corpse, his boat having capsized and trapped him beneath the waves, his net binding his limbs. She stared down at him, godly eyes able to pierce the veil of dark waters to observe him. And light filtered down from above, piercing through the waves farther than it ever should, touching his body and warming it.

She promised herself then and there, were she ever to find the old man's soul once again, she would find a way to repay him. Surely if she asked Lord Keilan he could find the soul for her...but who was she to ask someone that great for such a trivial favor? No, she would find him herself, or let fate and karma guide them to meet once more. Until that time, she would do...what? The other gods seemed obsessed with filling the Four Realms with angels and holy beasts and immortals of all kinds. That...didn't seem like her, even if she didn't yet know who she was.

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For a while she stood there, over the great sea, listening to the waves and watching the spirits dance about beneath the surface. There was so much to see in this vast, vast universe...and for some reason, now, she felt drawn to the little things. The day-to-day mundanities. Perhaps the old man was on to more than he knew.

With a flash of light she was gone, ready to walk the world of mortals.

The Paragon Soul's reincarnation cycle was a long process. Far longer than I expected. Things just didn't happen at the speed that I was used to – I lived eight lives in the span of four, maybe five thousand years on Earth. It would take Dei probably ten thousand just to live through three lifetimes. That number would actually be closer to twenty thousand years or longer, considering his first lifetime lasted ten thousand years, and his time between his death and first reincarnation had already reached a few thousand. It also made me increasingly convinced that he would be able to do what he said, and do what I did in half the number of lifetimes.

When the average Fae, without the aid of a high cultivation base, could live nearly three hundred years...well, there was just more one could do and cram into that life. And Dei's soul had been forced to do little with his next life.

He lived as a simple fisherman. For two hundred years he lived in that little village. It cannot be said what, exactly, he learned from this lifetime of loneliness, but it cannot be understated the profound effect it had on his soul. He went from Dei, the builder of Manu Ti, the greatest city of cultivators ever created and a man many had respected and even worshipped as a prophet-like being, to a simple fisherman. Not just any fisherman, and not one happy with his life, either. That was not his calling, and that was not what dwelt within the depths of his soul. Being unable to chase those dreams had burned him to the core. Yet it still taught him valuable lessons, deep within himself, burning away chunks of his being that were superfluous to his calling.

And now he once again re-entered the afterlife, his soul burdened with duty as it waited for another chance to reincarnate, for another place to be born into. It could be centuries until then. It could be millennia.

It all depended on how long he was willing to stay in the Spirit Realm, and how perfectly in-tune he needed his next life to be. Knowing him, he would aim for the most useful life and be forced to walk a knife's edge the whole time.

“Well now,” Keilan said, appearing beside me as I floated over the Sea of Memories, gazing down upon the Paragon Soul as it rolled a truly massive ball of energy up the slopes of the mountains separating the Ocean from the Karmic Valley. This was a task he had taken on himself, strings of karma binding his limbs as he struggled to push the large, boulder-like construction of energy. “Who tied their string around him?”

I knew what Keilan was talking about. A little string of karma wound its way around Dei's truesoul now, lassoed gently to the core of his being. It wasn't a red string, not yet, but it did hint at a connection to something and someone that ran deeper than a casual meeting. I, of course, knew who it was connected to. With how deeply my eyes could see now, I couldn't help but see it. However, their interaction had been...beneficial to both, so I saw no reason to ask or interfere.

...for now. I knew myself. Curiosity would get the better of me eventually.

"It's certainly an interesting development." I agreed after a moment of silence, nodding my head. However, we had other things to discuss. "How are the seeds coming?"

"They are...forming," Keilan said with a shake of his head, wings curling about him as he folded his hands into the sleeves of his dark robe. His gaze grew distant as he looked down, toward the heart of the Karmic Valley, where eight little seeds grew. "With much of the energies of the Four Realms still focused on healing, their growth is slow, though. I still find it an odd concept that a valley can have seeds."

"It's all metaphorical, son," I said with a shrug. "Even the valley itself. But that is quite alright; the Realms are still settling, and the rather explosive growth we've been experiencing probably doesn't help either. We don't need the seeds until this growing period ends, anyways." I explained, clasping my hands behind my back. I was mostly here to see how Keilan was handling the seeds growth. Though I was taking a direct interest in make sure they did develop properly, it was just as important to make sure my kids knew how to develop these seeds as well.

Just in case I had to go do something else. Soon. Which I could feel coming.

A frown tugged at the corners of my lips. How much further away was it? One hundred thousand years? Longer? Shorter? Mr. Boxes might be making an announcement about it soon, and the

anticipation was killing me. I shook my head to clear those thoughts, refocusing my attention on Keilan. All those thoughts were duties of my incarnations. My true body had a far more important task to attend to at the moment.

“Ready to go boating?” I asked. Keilan snorted out a laugh and nodded, waving his hand. A small fishing boat appeared in the waters of the Sea of Memories, complete with oars and a net in the bottom of the yellow-wood watercraft. I smiled to myself and descended onto the rowboat, sitting across from Keilan as he picked up the oars and began to row. There was no need for him to. If he so wished, the boat would propel itself across the waters. If he so wished, each stroke of the oars would drive us miles into the distance. As it was, we moved gently and slowly, Keilan enjoying the simple, monotonous motions, and myself enjoying the bobbing of the waves.

Below us echoes of memories darted about as little more than flashes of light.

And we talked, as Parent and Child.

That was all either of us needed, at the moment.