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# Star-Crossed

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From set *Lorwyn Eclipsed*  
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Cerys stood in the curved threshold of her late uncle's house, recoiling at the smell of souring moss and moldy leather tomes. It was nothing like she remembered from the time she'd spent there as a child.



Art by: Adam Paquette

Blackvine tendrils curled through a jagged window frame. A mess of glowing fungi had sprouted along the edges of the ceiling. Crystal ornaments, draped in layers of spider silk that glittered with dew, littered every surface. The cabinet at the back wall, once overflowing with samples of the rarest plants in all of Shadowmoor, now boasted empty jars and bare shelves. Her Uncle Gethin's collection had once been the envy of his peers, but Cerys doubted that even the boggarts would raid what was left behind.

Cerys took a few steps into the house, her gaze trailing toward the domed study. Stacks of long-forgotten correspondence were strewn across the surface of a gnarled wooden desk. A bell-shaped lantern hung directly above it, with a whisper of fading magic still shimmering along the punctured glass.

The Reliquary of Twilight hadn't been used much in her uncle's final months, but to see his most treasured belonging in such a broken state made her heart hurt. The decaying house was erasing his legacy, one keepsake at a time.

Her uncle's final letter weighed heavy in her cloak pocket. There had been no tales of his adventures as a bloomseeker, or stories from beyond the aurora. Just a few sentences scrawled with a tired hand, willing the last of his belongings to Cerys—the only blood relative he had left. She dragged a finger over the dusty fireplace and sighed. There was beauty in this room—it would just take a little time to find it.

Cerys thumbed through some of the old journals on the bookshelf, feeling a pang of grief at the sight of her uncle's familiar script. She could still hear his gravelly voice in her head. She pictured the way his long ears would flick when he was amused and recalled the earthy rumble of his laugh when he'd remind Cerys how little there was to fear in Lorwyn, because most creatures there feared the *elves*.

In Shadowmoor, it was quite the opposite.

Cerys would often fall asleep dreaming of a world without wild magic, where everything was tranquil and filled with sunlight—just like in Uncle Gethin's stories.

It was those very stories that kept her memories of him from tarnishing after he'd sent her away. He'd had his reasons: Cerys was more sensitive than most to the effects of the aurora. As a child, wandering too close to the border would sometimes leave her thoughts muddled for hours, and Uncle Gethin feared what might happen if her confusion caused her to venture straight into an eclipsed realm.

Deep down, Cerys understood that he'd only wanted to protect her—but she mourned those lost years fiercely.

When she picked up the next journal, she found a letter tucked behind the cover.

*Rhain,*

*I'm sorry. I don't know what else to say, except that I cannot provide what you need. I am sending another month's supply of balsam and hope you will find it improves your condition with continued use. Please understand that it's as much as I can do.*

*Yours sincerely, Gethin*

It didn't take Cerys long to spot a small parcel sitting on the shelf nearby, wrapped in thick bogleaf. The tag was addressed to a "Mr. Rhain Breckon." Cerys loosened the knotted twine to reveal a small jar of salve.

The skin between her brows pinched as she chewed the edge of her lip. It wasn't like her uncle to leave a letter unsent. At least not on purpose. And she had never known her uncle to moonlight as a healer.

She dreaded the thought of how long this Mr. Breckon might have been waiting for his medicine, perhaps wholly unaware of her uncle's demise.

Cerys rummaged through the desk drawers for a blank bit of parchment and an ink quill. Setting her uncle's journal aside, she began to write.

*Dear Mr. Breckon,*

*I apologize for the delay in getting this parcel to you. I hope the wait has not caused too much discomfort, and that the balsam will still be of some use. In any case, I must tell you that my uncle Gethin has passed away. I trust this information will allow you to make the necessary arrangements with another healer.*

*Regrettably, Cerys Awbrey*

She dusted the letter with drying powder, attached it to the parcel with more braided twine, and leaned out the window. In the curve of her palm, the parchment fluttered to life. Its paper wings glowed blue at the edges, shimmering with magic. Cerys lifted her hand up to the night sky, and the letter took off in the direction of its recipient. Not left, toward the city of Caer Flur, but *right*—toward the aurora.

Cerys blinked in surprise. She'd never corresponded with anyone from Lorwyn before. The edge of her mouth quirked in a grin. It was almost as if her uncle had left her one last gift.

She looked down at the ravaged garden outside, surrounded by tangled woodland, and decided to pay Uncle Gethin back the only way she knew how: by bringing life back into his home.

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Cerys awoke to the sound of paper beating against her ear. She sat up groggily and rubbed her eyes, squinting as she searched for the culprit.

A letter was perched on her bedpost.

She leaned forward to retrieve the fluttering parchment, unfolding the edges with care.

*It's a good thing I wasn't waiting on an antidote for poisoning, or else I'd most certainly be dead by now.*

Cerys balked at the letter, stunned. *Surely, he hadn't meant to send this as a reply?* She'd expect this kind of rudeness from a local kithkin or boggart, but not in Lorwyn, where people were supposed to be kind and helpful and—and—and—

With a biting snarl, she marched to the desk and reached for her quill.

*Dear Mr. Breckon,*

*I'd only sent the balsam out of concern that you'd been a long-standing acquaintance of my uncle's and might appreciate being made aware of his passing. It appears I have misjudged the situation, and will now consider this matter resolved.*

*Kind regards, Cerys Awbrey*

With a huff, she folded up the letter and sent it back through the window. After several hours of angrily peeling mushrooms off the ceiling, she received a reply.

*How convenient of Gethin to die instead of granting me the one request I ever asked of him. Your uncle is a coward.*

Cerys was aghast. *Uncle Gethin, a coward?* This stranger wasn't just wrong—he was abominably rude. And Cerys was not about to let him have the last word.

*Mr. Breckon,*

*My uncle would never have willfully abandoned someone in their time of need. If he did not follow through with something you asked of him, it would have been for a very good reason. Quite frankly, I do not believe you deserved his care.*

*Regards, C. Awbrey*

Satisfied that she'd made her thoughts clear, she watched the letter flutter out of her palm. Another hour passed; Rhain's reply barely made it through the window when Cerys snatched it midair.

*I may not have deserved his care, but I certainly didn't deserve to be left to die alone.*

Cerys fought hard not to roll her eyes. The melodrama of Lorwyn was definitely not something her uncle had prepared her for.

This man required a standard balsam. He was certainly not *dying*.

She busied herself with organizing her uncle's salvageable tomes, when she remembered what he'd told her about the elves on the other side of the aurora. How they were obsessed with beauty and perfection—so much so that their appearance determined their place in society. Vanity was a trivial problem to Cerys, but to Rhain, it was a matter of survival.

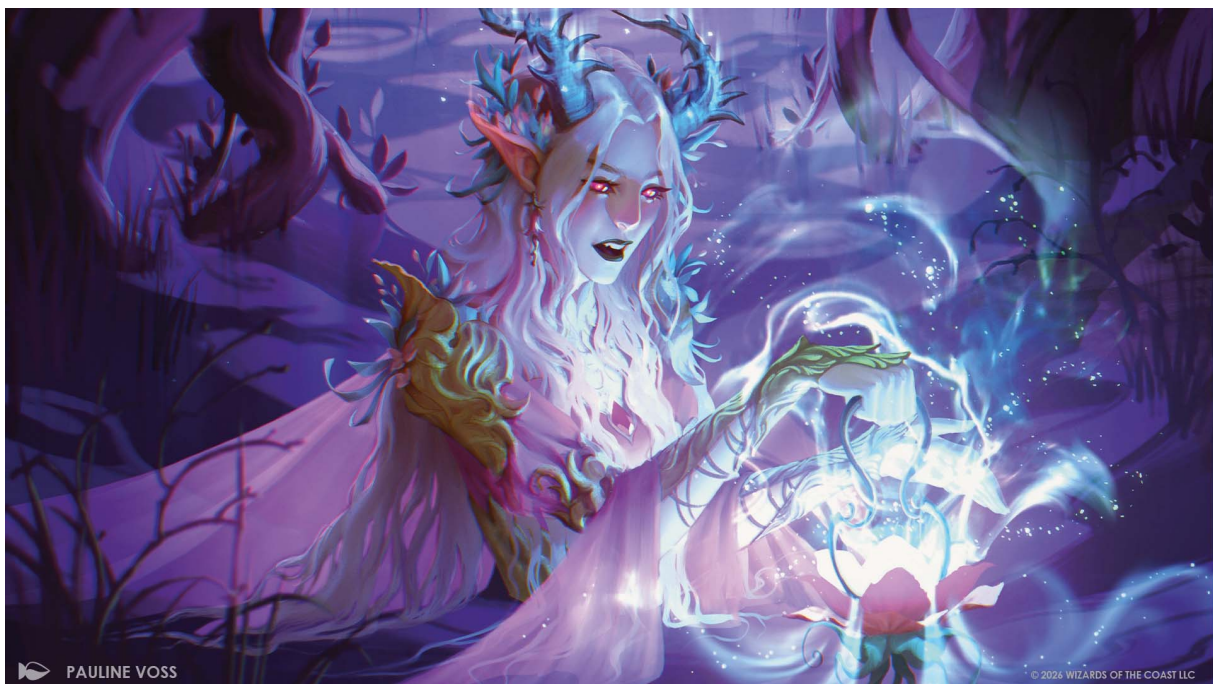
She stilled at the thought. Perhaps she was being too hard on him.

Searching the shelves for notes on balsam flowers, Cerys found herself flicking through page after page of her uncle's meticulous notes and hyper-realistic drawings. Some of the flowers inked on the pages were ones she'd never heard of before, but others could easily be found in the surrounding woodland. When she came to a drawing of a particular balsam flower called nightphlox, she turned the book sideways to read her uncle's note in the margin.

*Good for healing salves. Can only be grown in Shadowmoor.*

Cerys traced a finger over the fur-covered petals. There were thousands of them right outside her window. But without a reliquary, Rhain wouldn't be able to reach them—and if he'd had one of those, he'd never have sought Uncle Gethin's help in the first place.

Cerys had no choice. Vanity was in Rhain's nature; helping was in hers.



Art by: Pauline Voss

She made her way into the woods, plucked a handful of nightphlox from the moon-soaked glade, and carefully wrapped them in bogleaf. On the tag, she scratched a quick note.

*Boil and mix with oil and beeswax to make a salve. I will send you more next month.*

She was about to tuck into bed when a fluttering letter met her on the windowsill. It wasn't long—just two sentences that weighed so heavy, Cerys felt them press against her chest.

*Thank you, Ms. Awbrey. I am in your debt.*

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*Dear Cerys,*

*Your instructions on how to better blend the salve have been most helpful. I am confident that my third attempt will much improve the texture. As for the latest drawing you sent, I am pleased to report the snaplily is native to Lorwyn, as you suspected. There was once an entire meadow of them near the forest, but when the aurora shifted some years ago, it took half the village with it and the flowers have been lost to an eclipsed realm. I did, however, stumble across some thistleweed currently in bloom near the watermill and have enclosed a sample that I hope will be useful in the restoration of your uncle's collection.*

*Well wishes, Rhain*

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*Dear Rhain,*

*I'm very grateful for the sample you sent. Uncle Gethin's cabinet is starting to look much more like it once did. It makes me happy to think he likely saw your snaplily meadow before it fell to the aurora. I have been wondering though—if my uncle was in Lorwyn before the border shifted and you say you were there, too, then you must have known each other for quite some time. If it's not too much trouble, I'd love to hear the story of how you met.*

*Very humbly, Cerys*



Art by: Jason A. Engle

*Dear Cerys,*

*It was the very day the aurora shifted that I met your uncle. I was hunting in the woods when the border began to move. In my hurry to get away, I let my guard down and a boggart attacked me. By the time I was able to fight him off, I was already deep in the eclipsed realm. I would never have made it out if Gethin hadn't been there. He helped me back to Lorwyn and tended my wounds. Over the months we became friends, at a time when I had lost all others. I regret that my final letter to him was not kind. The truth is, without your uncle, I would not still be here.*

*Most sincerely, Rhain*

*Dear Rhain,*

*I'm very sorry to hear of the attack. I hadn't wanted to pry into the reason you needed the balsam, but if it's due to what happened in the aurora, then you were very lucky to have escaped with your life. My uncle often spoke of a calcification process that happens when some living things are trapped in the eclipsed realms, battling a dual nature that is neither fully Shadowmoor nor Lorwyn. His notes detail many plants that have turned to husks as a result—a terrifying fate that I'm grateful you were able to avoid. If it's any consolation, Uncle Gethin would not have held your final letter against you; he believed in forgiveness, always. I think he'd be glad to know we have become correspondents, and that I'm here for whatever you may need.*

*Your friend, Cerys*

Rhain's quill hovered above the parchment. Words ricocheted through his head, begging to be put to paper. There was only one thing he wanted, and only one person who could get it for him.

His gaze drifted to the mirror beside his desk, meeting the reflection he'd tried so hard to be rid of.

Shiny waves of black hair fell just below his shoulders, crowned by a pair of alabaster horns that curled into gilded tips. He stared into the black depths of his eyes, feeling a pinch of shame as he followed the silvery claw marks that scarred his face. Three calcified lines stretched from his forehead to his jawline, shimmering with the memory of what had happened in the aurora. The surrounding skin had lightened to a sickly, mottled gray that felt rough to the touch.

Rhain knew what would happen if he returned to Lys Alana looking like this. The elves would shun him in an instant. They'd call him an eyeblight, and he'd be forced into the lowest caste of elven society.

He couldn't face them. Not even to return home. It was better to remain here, in the abandoned kithkin village, and let the others believe he'd died.

Slipping a finger below his collar, he pulled the material of his shirt back to reveal the stone lines that spread down his neck like dark, pulsing veins. They were growing dangerously close to his chest. It wouldn't be long before they reached his heart.

Rhain's pointed ears twitched in disgust. He turned from the mirror, still clutching the quill between his fingers.

He stared again at the blank parchment, searching for the courage to ask Cerys for the one thing Gethin refused to give him. Dawnglove was the only cure for Rhain's ailment, but it was sacred in Shadowmoor.

Rhain had begged for it. Pleaded with his very life. Yet Gethin would not even consider it, too caught up in protecting the beauty of a flower rather than the life of a friend. It made it worse that he was gone. Rhain had no one to be angry at anymore.

He could try his luck with Cerys; perhaps she'd be more willing to break the rules of her people. But if she refused him, he worried his anger might become directed at her—and he couldn't bear to lose another friend.

He'd already accepted the balms weren't working; it was time to accept his fate. Very soon, the mark would calcify his heart, and he would die.

But at least he wouldn't have to spend his final days alone.

Rhain brushed a fallen strand of hair from his brow and began to write.

*Dear Cerys,*

*It is very generous of you to offer me aid, but I promise there is nothing left that I need. I do, however, greatly enjoy reading your letters, so please send as many as you like. I promise to repay you with as many wildflowers from Lorwyn as I can gather.*

*Faithfully yours, Rhain*

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*Dear Rhain,*

*I fear you will regret that promise, because it has recently become my aim to make Uncle Gethin's cabinets the envy of every bloomseeker in Shadowmoor. Being as you are my only connection to Lorwyn, I will now be writing to you most often indeed. Prepare yourself. Elves in Shadowmoor take collecting very seriously.*

*Affectionately yours, Cerys*

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*Dear Cerys,*

*I was hoping you would say that.*

*Your devoted servant, Rhain*

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There wasn't a trace of blackvine left in the house. The cupboards were stocked with flora samples, the journals were organized by year, and Cerys could smell the flourishing garden from the open window, the aroma rich with night blossoms.

She scratched a few notes in one of her own journals, humming peacefully to herself, when a treefolk howled in the distance, making her start. Her elbow knocked the desk, making a jar of drying powder roll on its side before tumbling over the edge.

Glass shattered across the floor.

Cerys bent down to clean the shards when she noticed some of the powder had drifted through the cracks of a loose floorboard. Frowning, she dug her fingers into the edge and pulled the wood free. Tucked in the hidden space was a pouch wrapped in braided vine.

She loosened the knot and inhaled sharply. There was a letter inside—along with a stem of dawnglove.

*Why would Uncle Gethin have this?* Cerys's thoughts raced in alarm. Not even the most devoted bloomseekers would *dream* of unearthing such a precious flower.

She unfolded the letter with a shaky hand, recognizing her uncle's handwriting.

*Dear Rhain,*

~~*I have what you asked for, but you must*~~

~~*Please understand how imperative it is that no one finds out*~~

~~*There are rules here, and if I send you this*~~

*Please don't hate me. I'm sorry.*

Another message, meant for Rhain, that hadn't been sent.

Cerys stood abruptly, rummaging through the drawer until she held both letters in her hands. She raised them to the light, comparing every word.

*This is what Rhain had asked Uncle Gethin for*, she realized, staring in bewilderment at the dawnglove, *and Uncle Gethin had almost risked everything to send it to him.*

Except ... he *hadn't* sent anything. Not the flower, and not the reply turning him down.

*Was Uncle Gethin still making up his mind? Had he really been undecided about whether it was okay to mar such a sacred plant?*

If that was the case ... if Rhain was suffering from something that could only be cured with dawnglove ... then that must mean—

Both letters slipped from Cerys's fingers.

She grabbed a piece of parchment and scribbled the fastest message she'd ever written.

*Rhain. Are you dying?*

The note shot out of the window in a flurry of blue dust. Cerys sat in the chair and waited, too afraid that if she moved, the fear building behind her ribs might overwhelm her.

Not an hour passed before a reply settled on the desk in front of her.

*I am.*

A coarseness formed in the back of her throat, making her breath hitch. Salt clouded her vision as she stared at the pouch. She knew how wrong it was for her uncle to have plucked the dawnglove. She knew how wrong it was to keep it hidden, even now. It went against everything her kind stood for.

If the world found out what Uncle Gethin had stolen, his legacy would be ruined.

*But Rhain ...*

Cerys's skin prickled with heat as she faced the same dilemma that her uncle once did. No matter what choice she made, she'd be betraying a part of her conscience.

Shame clenched her heart, squeezing until she could hardly breathe.

*You should have told me the truth*, she wrote, and watched the folded parchment vanish behind the trees.

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The rattle in Rhain's chest was incessant. He felt as if his lungs were full of sand, grating every inhale. He'd been trying to muster the energy to reply to Cerys's last note, but he'd scarcely been able to lift his head more than an inch from his pillow.

He was running out of time.

Another coughing fit hit him, making his stomach muscles spasm. When it eased, he forced himself off the edge of the bed and collapsed into the chair at his desk. He ignored the mirror, unwilling to see how sallow his cheeks had become.

Straining to hold the quill straight, Rhain began to pen his final letter.

*Dear Cerys,*

*You're right. I should have told you. But I didn't want to. You have never known the truth of my scars—and I was glad for you to imagine me as I was, and not what I've become. As I write this now, there's something I want to confess: It occurred to me some weeks back that I had no idea what you looked like. I'd never asked. But more surprising to me was the realization that I didn't care—because whatever your appearance, it holds no weight in what I feel for you. You, Cerys, are the very best part of my day. I was grateful to your uncle*

*—but I will treasure the time I knew you, with whatever moments I have left. Please don't worry. I'm not afraid of dying; I only wish it didn't mean I had to lose you.*

*Yours, Rhain*

He watched the fluttering parchment disappear beyond the clouds. Sunlight warmed his brow, and he stood with his hands clutching the window frame until the dizziness became unbearable. Only then did he drag himself slowly back to bed, not bothering to tuck himself beneath the blanket.

As his eyelids grew heavy, he thought of the ink stains blotched on his fingers—a reminder of Cerys that he'd get to keep forever—and managed one last smile before the darkness took him.

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Something cool pressed against Rhain's lips. Nectar rolled across his tongue, and he gulped sip after sip until every muscle in his body began to settle. He felt stronger than he had in years. Content, even in death.

Rhain's lashes fluttered open, and he focused on the stranger hovering above his bed. An elf, but—different.

The woman's hair was bone white, tied in a long braid that fell past her waist, with a pale pink complexion that was merely a shade lighter than the thorny vines that spiraled into horns at her head. Her lilac cloak draped over her tunic like layers of flower petals, trailing all the way to the floor.

One of her hands held a small bowl filled with an aromatic liquid; the other gripped a broken lantern that flickered in slow, fading warnings.

Rhain stared at the weakening light before his attention jerked back to the woman. Behind her dark eyes was worry, fear, and hope ... all directed at *him*.

His stomach tightened. The way she was looking at him now ...

"Cerys?" he croaked in alarm. He threw his legs over the side of the bed, straightening with an ease he had forgotten, and nearly lost his footing. He closed his hands over her shoulders, stilling them both. "What are you doing here?"

Cerys tilted her head, eyes turning glassy. "I couldn't let you—" The bowl slipped, clattering heavily to the floor. She instantly recoiled, hissing through sharp teeth as she shook his hands away. "*Don't touch me!*" she snarled, expression filling with disgust.

Rhain pulled back immediately, brow crumpling as he watched her gaze drag over his scars. He felt each one of them as if the boggart was splitting his flesh all over again. He brought his hand up, shielding the side of his face.

Cerys blinked in confusion, brow softening. "No—I didn't mean—I don't know why I said that. I'm so sorry, Rhain, I was only trying to—" She looked down at the spilled liquid drifting through the cracks in the floor. Unease tightened around her words. "Did it work? Was it enough?"

Finally, Rhain understood. He let his hand drop. "You fed me dawnglove. You crossed the aurora."

"I wanted you to live," Cerys said with a shaky breath. The lantern gave a sharp flicker, and she bared her teeth. "*You'd be better off dead!*"

Rhain stared at the fading lantern's glow. "Your reliquary ... It's broken."

"No wonder you were afraid of being cast out," she seethed, ignoring him. "*You're hideous!*"

With anyone else, Rhain might've bristled with hurt. But as he studied her crumpled face, expression battling the dissonance between her true nature and the distorted version cursed by the Morningtide, the only thing he felt was concern. Her skin was beginning to mottle—far more rapidly than anything Rhain had experienced himself.

He'd only briefly been caught in the eclipsed realm, but Cerys had crossed the border entirely. And the harder she fought her infliction, the faster it seemed to spread.

If she remained in Lorwyn much longer ...

"Cerys," he said stiffly. "You need to get back to Shadowmoor immediately."

She clutched the side of her head with confusion, shaking away her thoughts like she was afraid of them. "I didn't mean it, Rhain. You're not hideous. You're—" Her words were cut off by a choking sound as she clawed her own neck.

Rhain lunged forward, catching her body in his arms before she fell. He held her against his chest while she spat curses at him. "It's okay," he whispered against her temple. "I'm going to make sure you're okay."

With Cerys in his arms, Rhain burst from the house with every ounce of energy he could muster. He ran through the empty village, veering up the dirt path and over the cobbled bridge that led to the woods.

The aurora moved like brushstrokes through the trees, pulling at every surrounding color until they blurred into shadow. An unpredictable force of energy that refused to bow to any laws of nature.

Rhain knew what could happen if he wandered too far in the eclipsed realm, but as he watched the pebbled discoloration move quickly over Cerys's body as she raged against her dueling personas, he didn't care about the consequences.

He just wanted to get Cerys home safe.

"Don't worry," he told her as she sputtered another apology. "We're almost there."

Her body grew heavy. He refused to look back down at what was happening to her skin and instead focused on the nearing border. The moment he stepped into the aurora, Cerys went rigid. He clung to her frame even as he staggered forward, knees colliding against the hardened earth.



Art by: Ovidio Cartagena

Rhain looked down in horror. Cerys was stone from the waist down.

“No,” he growled, blinking away the sting in his eyes. “I won’t lose you. Not like this.”

Cerys looked up, her mind once again her own. She reached for Rhain, cupping the edge of his jaw. “For what it’s worth, I think your scars are beautiful. I’m sorry your world made you feel like you had to hide them.”

Rhain pressed his forehead against hers, feeling the familiar wave of calcification rushing through his bloodstream. It wasn’t the slow poison he’d suffered for years—it hit him like a flood, bursting through his veins as it raced for his heart to finish what it started years before.

“You should go,” Cerys rasped on the edge of a dying breath.

Rhain shook his head above her, grazing her nose with his. “I will not leave you here alone.”

Cerys blinked back in response, and he watched the shine in her eyes dull.

He didn’t flinch when he began to calcify beside her. He simply held her close and set to memorizing every curve of her face. As the aurora consumed his final breath, the flutter of parchment became a lullaby in his memories.

Mist and glowing firebugs blurred the trees around them, wrapping them in a silent embrace as Rhain and Cerys turned to stone in each other’s arms.

In between worlds and eternally at rest, together.