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## The Peace between Us

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“Before there is peace, blood will spill, and the lake will run red.”

I saw red. It was the colour of a rose, a bright, flamboyant red. I thought I saw poppies, but I couldn't see clearly in the sea of redness. Then, it wasn't just a bright red. It grew a few shades deeper, closer to darkness and appearing more sinful. Still, it was red, all red.

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I stood atop the hill that overlooked the valley, with the wind whipping my skin and grasping my hair. Coldness seeped up my spine, and shivers began to consume me. It was silent, except for the wind, the chilling howls of loneliness. The world was asleep. Yet I was awake, guarding my city.

Sand flowed through the hole of the hourglass, dripping in a fluent motion. The moon started its escape from the sun, and the stars followed suit. The age-old chase never ceased. The moon would always run. Through centuries alone atop the hill, I had learnt the names of the constellations. I had learnt the stories of my only companion through the night, my moon. Then, the sun came up and lit up our world. She poured gold on our land and woke our people. It was beautiful to watch in the halcyon days of an era, people awaking from their slumber ready for a new day.

My people lived in harmony. The river, the sun and the mountains were all their friends. Olive trees and white poppies lined our gardens, blooming in pride and goodness. Our houses stood tall to form perfect lines, extending from the plaza. If you came knocking at the door of any of our people asking for help, help would be given. If you reached out your hand, our people would take it. There was neither a king nor a queen. The city of marble had no ruler. It didn't need one. There were no plays of power, no fights and arguments either.

Our people hid nothing in the darkness, no lies and no deception. There wasn't one individual greater than another, as we were all sons and daughters of the sun and moon. I watched as generations replaced generations. I watched as my people grew old with wisdom and left our world. My people lived on in the footsteps of their ancestors.

It was all too perfect.

That was peace built upon lifetimes of work, founded upon glowing marbles of harmony. We lived on a blessed land. It was what heaven was like.

But, then, they came.

The men wore glistening black armours, exuding a lustre that most people craved for in life. The sheen was almost blinding, luring people to taste the empty satisfaction of power and control. They didn't realise what lay under was skin and flesh already rotten, and a mind that was nibbling away. Riding black horses with wild manes, they tromped into our land mercilessly. I watched in abhorrence as the Black Knight looked down on my people in their dreams. The Black Army was the pawn of the devil; they were after our piece of heaven.

We had hidden ourselves away from danger for millenniums. Yet now, danger had found its way to us. What other option did we have but to defend our city?

Our people were forced to rise before dawn, they were forced to hoist their tools as weapons. None of my people were wearing armour. Before this, some of them had not even seen the invincible metal shells that tore away and nibbled at their remaining humanity. The Black Army held its swords high in the air, as if they were already triumphant, as if coming to an innocent valley and slaughtering people was a noble act.

The armour protected their bodies, but marred their minds.

I broke free from the mountain, shaking off the shining gems of snow. My muscles felt raw and stiff. I didn't remember the last time I left the mountains for such a cause. It was my duty as the guardian of the people to ward off all evil, to fight against malicious armies. I had been honoured to stay in the mountains without needing to defend my city. But the times of peace had fled, and chaos had erupted. Every second I wasted on the mountains meant more blood spilt on my land. I started running down the slopes, leaving behind a thousand footprints. The wind howled, and the mountains echoed.

I thought of all the faces of my people, their warm smiles and hearty greetings. I thought of the elderly sitting under the olive trees, relishing the sun on their skin. I thought of the children running free in the streets of our city, plucking poppies, laughter grazing my ears. I thought of the men and women working to keep their families together, their love for the young and their respect for the elderly. I ran faster and faster. Nothing mattered but the people.

Please.

When I finally reached my beloved city, my hopes were shattered. Tears sprung to my eyes, blurring my vision. Right before my eyes, the Black Army marched on, their torches setting our olive trees ablaze, their filthy horses trampling upon our gardens. Muffled cries from my people pierced my ears from every direction, drawing blood from my heart.

I could still save them, and I could still save us. There was still a chance. As long as I didn't give up, peace might still arrive on our land. I kept on running, dragging my dress with me. The pure whiteness of my dress was eventually tinted by the dirt and filth on the ground, the evidence of their callous invasion.

Only the Black Knight occupied my mind. He led the attack against my haven, he ruined the city of marble and turned it into debris. He took advantage of the peace-loving minds of my people and forced them to fight. Who did he think he was to strip my people from their lives, from their harmony? What power did he possess other than cruelty?

Millenniums of effort all turned into ashes. Did he not hear the winds howling in pain? Did he not see our olives burning in rage? I heard my people mourning, their innocent, desperate pleading. My people never sinned against them, yet they came slashing swords at us. Our peace and tranquility have been disturbed.

He warred against us. With a flick of his sword, violence had replaced love. Did he not notice his sins? Yet, I could not treat him with violence. For if I did, I would be a monster, just like him. I had to contain my searing rage. I had to cage my emotions as well as the demon inside. I would not fight back, at least not with my hands. I had a weapon much more powerful, my only weapon — a smile.

I had dedicated my whole life to guarding my city. I had chosen to stay atop the mountain that overlooked my whole world. And right here, a man of ill wishes was trying to tear down the centre of my universe. I would not surrender, ever.

Bracing myself for cold blades, I stepped towards the Black Knight, amidst the clattering of metal, the sounds of battle. I poured all that I had into my every step, and I smiled the warmest smile ever. Tears threatened to spill.

In our city of marble, blood had been spilt, and poppies had been dyed red. It became a decadent city glistening in red. I gathered the red poppies in my hands and scattered them along the way. With each poppy, I whispered a prayer, a prayer for my warriors who fought for a great cause.

The poppies fell downward, flowing downstream in the river of blood. It was red, all red.

As I walked towards the Knight on his almighty horse, my façade broke and my smile disappeared. My poppies were long gone except for one, destined for the Knight. I could not hold in the tears of frustration, nor my hatred for the Black Army. Every step was crushing me inside. My feet were tied to weights I could no longer carry.

Towards the end of the path, it all was silent. The sounds of metal clashing, the cries — all of those sounds ceased. When I finally reached the Knight, he slid off his horse and faced me. I reached out my hand tentatively and caressed the cold metal of his helmet. I took the poppy and placed it above his chest plate.

The sudden clatter of the Knight's sword on the ground pierced the night sky.

Dawn had just broken.

Gently, he bowed down his head. I closed my eyes, leaned forward and pressed my forehead to his, flesh to metal.