

The Stillness of Time

Ni'vim POV

Over another year has passed since I saw the frog in the puddle. The coveted age that I had longed for finally arrived. I am close to the end of my seventeenth year, and my village elders have granted me the autonomy to, at last, venture out of Phos'rrah.

I returned to the same spot where I had first cast my gaze upon the frog. The puddle that was once here was no longer present. Replacing it was the glimmer of deep azure, as various plants had grown over it. The grasslands had morphed from their usual verdant green into the luster of indigo. It paralleled the mostly blue but sometimes green skies from high above.

The frog was no longer present. Perhaps it had already found solace elsewhere.

Most importantly, it had already left its cradle.

Today was not a day suited for pedagogy. One's accumulated wisdom should not be confined to theories. Too little or too much knowledge begets blindness.

Standing before the fields, I cast a look of anger at the surrounding buildings of my village. Too long have I been accustomed to this place. The place that I have called home was soon becoming a prison for the soul. Beside me stood my father, Seg'niu, whose eyes glistened with verve as he looked into me.

"Dear daughter. Today is a momentous day, for you and Bebiu have reached the required age to finally venture out of the village," he said.

"Yes, indeed," I said. "But the irony is that I have gotten so used to maundering mindlessly along these idyllic pastures that I have forgotten what or where I wanted to go."

"Then, I will guide you by showing you something of great importance."

"Please show me!" I raised my voice, nearly hopping from sheer excitement.

"Not too far from our town are the floating islands of Yal'mara. There, you will observe the legendary isles as they stay afloat on a thin cushion of air. Several dozen islands, each bordered with their craggy exteriors. No one knows how the isles can stay suspended in the sky. Atop one of them, you will

find the mythical Su Ve Vi'hara," said my father as he handed a map to me that unfurled, showing blue blobs upon it.

"The Su Ve Vi'hara! My elders have spoken of its enchanting powers. They have all seen it. But some trembled at having looked into it. It's too much for one's shoulders to carry."

"Do not worry." My father's eyes mellowed into calmness as they half-closed. "You will gaze into it. Some say that the pool has magical properties. Once you stare into it, the pond becomes a reflection of one's soul – of one's greatest aspirations. Do you want to find out what gives happiness and fulfillment in your life?"

"I don't know. It takes away the suspense and thrill of unraveling one's own life." A puff of air exited my mouth, relieving me for mere seconds before I once more flowed with the rhythm of life.

"Many do not see it that way. Only the generals are given, but the specifics are not. Remember Sha'ra's words?"

"Then, that isn't too bad. A useful guide to lead me to the door, but free will is still mine. I must choose whether to walk through the door or turn back." I smiled, relieved.

"It is neither good nor bad. The irony is that we are a living paradox. We sometimes need a guiding light to show us the path out of the infinite abyss and darkness that trap us. Otherwise, we would remain entrapped in this vicious cycle that compels us towards more darkness."

"That would waste too many years." I shook my head.

"Yes. But the opposite is that, sometimes, if the guiding light shines too brightly, it will cast aside all shadows. We would then only see the light and nothing else."

"Never a good thing."

"Yes, when that happens, everything in our lives becomes prescribed, and we lose the capacity of free will. Perhaps, the truth lies somewhere in between, that we need a little of either to thrive."

A breeze gently gushed over me, and I looked at the fields of rustling grass. Mild tingles spread throughout my body.



Spiritual Tenet

*For life to be whole, you must experience both the shadow and
the light.*



"That is most pleasing to hear," I said before placing my hands together with anxious quivers. "But I'm afraid to go alone. It is the first time I am venturing outside the village."

"Bebiu will go with you. When you are there, I did like you to do something. It is of great importance."

"What is it?"

My father got a scroll next to him, unfurling it to gaze at its many symbols. Mumbling for a while, he again turned at me.

"These scrolls are imbued with magical symbols that weave Vi'la. You don't need mastery in Vi'la Re to cast spells when you have these, but they are used up upon a few charges," he said.

"What are they for?"

"When you are there, chant a certain Kar into the pool using the scrolls, but only after you have completed your mission."

"A Kar?"

"Kara are invocations that imbue Vi'la Re – the foundation of all wizardry. They materialize it into some tangible result. When you are there, please do as I have instructed."

I could not have been more pleased to begin my voyage with Bebiu. Years of wishing for such had reached their culmination upon this very day.

I packed my provisions with glee and met Bebiu on the village's outskirts. There, both of us gazed into an infinite lacuna that could never be seen nor touched. It was a bottomless chasm formed out of a void that combined the mysteries of the cosmos and youth's ignorance. We both looked not at each other, but it did not matter. What mattered was that we were glaring in the same direction.

"All provisions prepared?" asked Bebiu.

"Everything is ready," I said. "Come, let us make haste. It is time to see what the future has installed for us."

"Haste? No, life is not a race. That is what my mother has always reminded me of. She said that life is not a series of stops to pass through to reach some eventuality." His eyes glowed with philosophical intrigue as he spoke in upbeat tones.

"There is no end." A crescent appeared over my face.

"There never was, and never will be. Once you reach the end, there will always be something ahead to look forward to."

"A wise statement."

"If that is the case, why not bide our time and slowly enjoy the scenic views at each stop before moving on? Rushing through would defeat the purpose of life, for it involves more than just moving through time."

"True. Participation is its essence. If it were not, life would be meaningless." We both nodded.



Spiritual Tenet

Life is not an arena or a race. You find meaning in life, not by working towards a goal. Rather, you immerse yourself in the process of living.



The comment struck me as pithy and witty. Although adrenaline was rushing through me, there was much truth in his words. With this, both of us slowed our steps into trots. We enjoyed the brisk of the winds as they gushed over our shoulders.

The friendliness of my friend, Bebiu, could not be understated. Although quiet to speak by nature, this was not to be confused with nonchalance. In times of need, Bebiu had the ability for the needy to fall upon his broad shoulders and a pair of listening ears. He would offer counsel and allay the greatest of despairs. When motivated, Bebiu exuded an aura of confidence, keen on exchanging ideas and emotions.

The legendary floating islands would be a scenic view that one has to discern with one's eyes.

Life is defined not by the number of experiences we have but by the number of such that take us away. In this maxim, we had resolved upon our mission today. We had gotten a provision of some five days of supplies. Filled with errantry, we embarked.



Spiritual Tenet

Life is defined not by how long one lives. Rather, it is defined by how well one has lived in whatever short period it has.



Our long walk toward the destination began. Two youthful minds were the greatest recipe for adventure. Having long acclimated to comfort, the old would find themselves undriven to seek adventure.

"Our elders have spoken of the concept of time," said Bebiu. "They asserted that all time is cyclical. What does that mean precisely?"

"I don't know. Our elders speak in an unknown tongue. They spoke of time as though the past and future do not exist. Only the present is all that matters – now and here, here and now! What gibberish do they speak of?" A chuckle left my mouth and Bebiu's face brimmed with a smile.

"That's why I never think about the future – it becomes now soon enough." *Wise words, Bebiu. Wise words.*

"We may never know what happens until we have traversed the road."

We both exchanged thoughts on the ontology of time. Minutes dragged on into hours and hours into days.

Time is fleeting in as much as it is eternal. Transience and eternity are the most amicable bedfellows. All that is eternal cannot exist without every passing moment.

"It is cyclical," I said. "All things in the cosmos repeat themselves. Tadpoles mature into frogs. Larvae into moths. And likewise, frogs, moths, and salamanders unto death. And from death, life springs forth from the festering dead."

For many centuries, the blue peoples of the northwest have stagnated. Technology is simple, existing only in the most fundamental oral and written traditions. It manifests via simple bows, spears, fabric, pottery, and leather.

A thousand years ago.

One century ago.

A year ago.

Not a scrap of progress has transpired within the avian civilization. Time repeated across each generation. With no

progression, time froze like an icicle suspended upon the eternal cheek of time.

Regardless, we could not ignore three days. We had finally reached the fabled destination.

It was a work of nature as much as it was a work of our god, Os'los. Two dozen islands had suspended high above the ground. Each had its rocky crusts covered with a swathe of verdant-blue. They pierced into the lofty clouds high in the skies. It was an intersection between earth and heaven. Harmony – formed by two immiscible forces, had found itself in a rich interplay. By some uncanny power, we saw flowing rivers. Their waters discharged themselves into the grounds below.



Not much was known about the genesis of the waters or how they were replenished. The chirps of birds wove into a deep symphony. It was so melodious to our ears that the voice of Os'los had called out to us. If there was ever a place ripe for the huddled masses of the poor to seek solace, no doubt they would have chosen this place.

Bebiu and I had many disagreements about our philosophies. However, there was little discord between us about a single realization: that paradise is not a mere figment of one's imagination. Instead, it is of some property that is soothing

to the mind and soul. Before us was a haven that abated all ills within us just by gazing at it.

"We have reached Yal'mara," I said. Slurping upon a gourd, water trickled from the sides of my mouth.

"Indeed, we have. And this place of wonder is more mesmerizing than I can ever imagine. But I fear that now that we have been led to such a zenith of perfection. I wonder if there is a purpose in seeking anything else."

"There is, and there shall always be a higher mountain. For now, our eyes shall relish such a spectacle. Let not a moment of anxiety distract us from the wonder that looms before us."

"Is there any way we can ascend to those heights?"

"I'm glad you asked – I have obtained several magical scrolls. Courtesy of my father, of course. There's enough for our return journey."

"Wonderful! I did so like to see the pond of insights. It is said to dwell in the highest apex of those floating islets."

"That much, we shall see if it exists."

With a swift invocation, we unfolded the scrolls. The surroundings glistened with pale shades of pink, which morphed into azure. We found ourselves magically afloat puffs of misty white, heading towards coveted peaks that loomed ahead.

The blue peoples possess only the most primitive crafts. The array of magical prowess we had compensated for our lack. The power of flight – coveted even by the Yertians of the central mountains – is a gift free to us.

We cast a panoramic view upon the prairies below as we flew through the skies.

Since it is near summer, the fields were replete with lush, blue chlorophylls. An entire stretch of blue arrayed itself across the ground. They scintillated in the most vibrant of colors.

Luu Vi'osla – mercurial creatures made of ectoplasm, roamed in large numbers throughout the fields ahead. They differed from normal Vi'osla and exuded extremely luminous gold and white. From atop, they resembled a kaleidoscope of the most exalted order.

While floating through the air, a terrible calamity loomed ahead of us. Gazing behind us, we heard the combined squawks of dozens of beings. At first, I knew not what they were, but they appeared like a nebula – a diffuse cloud comprising thousands of entities.

As they approached, we saw the fluttering of hundreds of wings headed straight for us. A horrible screech ripped the air asunder. It was so deafening that my eardrums rippled with agony.

"Oh no," said Bebiu. "Those are Ko'rasha! Cover your ears!"

Each had a coat of deep black, much like crows or ravens. All of them had two pairs of wings, flapping alternatively from one another.

As they neared us, the crescendo of their screeches nearly ruptured my ears. Ko'rasha are known as the *Black Death* – for a good reason. Their collective wails form a melody synonymous with death. Once a person has heard this entire lethal symphony, their breathing and heartbeats would halt, and they would be ferried into the realm of the dead.

As they neared us, their symphonies echoed with blistering loudness. Covering our ears did not help, as we could still hear its tones.

"I'm too young to be dancing to death just yet!" I yelled as the storm approached.

As the dirge of death continued to resound in my mind, my peripheral vision dulled. My limbs grew numb, and a tingling sensation rippled throughout my body. My legs were infirm, and my breaths were short. The pulses of my heart slowed until I could hear its throbs near the edge of death. Stupor filled me, and the light before me slowly faded by the minute.

I attempted to reach for my scrolls to unleash a torrent of magic upon my foes. However, my senses had numbed to where I could not even feel my hands. I cast a look upon Bebiu and saw that he was reaching out for something in his bag.

Bebiu must have thought of something. In his satchel was a lute, which he reached out at once to play. He inhaled and began singing:

"Life is not a line.
No one ever adheres to such.
For if it did, life would be bereft,
fated, and destined without change.

No one would ever wish to live
in a cosmos where the prison walls
comprise the invisible bars
of fate, which seals everyone.

Think of life as many tangents:
each veering and swerving

in a great many directions.

In the end, we must conclude
that life has no prescriptions,
other than our own."

As the euphony of his songs echoed in my mind, the requiem of death was muffled until no effect was possible. The flock of deathly birds soon passed, and we escaped from their dangers.

My original numbness faded. For while there was lethargy, now there was clarity. Gasping for air, light once more returned to my vision. The darkness that nearly killed me soon drifted away.

"That was close," I said. "Good thinking there, friend! We would have entered the gallows if not for your originality!"

"We are not out of danger yet. Quick! We must settle on high ground fast!"

Now was not the time for sightseeing. We found ourselves atop the largest of the floating isles – named by its discoverer, Kos'hara.

We scurried atop the island until we observed a large pond speckled by frothy and rising bubbles. There was little doubt what we had just described.

"It's the legendary pond often spoken in stories that our parents used to tell us," said Bebiu.

"Reality is often stranger than fiction. And now, I can discern why this is the case. Here, the divine has found its expression within the mundane."

"We've been all the way up here; let's go frequent the pool. They say that the pond reflects one's inner being. One merely needs to stare into its refractive surface for one to unveil one's innermost secrets."

Indeed, no deceit is possible before the glowering contents of its reflection. Every deed worthy of appraisal or guilt is revealed to the viewer.

"My father sent me here because he said I would uncover what I covet most in life," I said.

We approached the mystical pond with eagerness and caution. We then bowed before the landmark of spiritual significance.

"The villagers call this the Su Ve Vi'hara," I said.

"Remember to focus only on the positive," said Bebiu. "Secrets lurk within the darkest corners of our minds. You do not want to see the most sinister shadows that lurk within the caverns of such."

I placed my head near the glittering surface. Frothy bubbles that concealed every morsel of truth from us filled it. Droplets fell from the skies, bringing a soothing impact on my psyche. The water was neither brackish nor muddled.

As I stared into it, light shimmered before us, with spates of sprightly pink. It then morphed into shades of azure and indigo, which merged into unrecognizable forms. As I peered into the glimmering surface of the liquid before me, a medley of lights constellated into an enormous circle. Symbols of an arcane tongue loomed before me. Each looked as if the hand of a deity had made its impression upon them. They shone with a glaring gold – the color of the heavens and perhaps of life itself. As the words glittered before me, two verses resonated immediately within me: *Ei'lara* and *Kol'lara*:

Ei'lara



Kol'lara



Ei'lara? Is that not the mythical tongue that my elders have spoken of? The one said to harbor powers of mysticism too abstruse for the world to comprehend? As for *Kol'lara* – what exactly is it? Around the circumference of the circle were two inner rings. One glowed with pink, while the other shimmered with red.

The truth flashed in my mind, and I knew.

So that's it.

The former corresponded to *Ei'lara*, while the latter symbolized *Kol'lara*. Each revolved around the center in opposite directions. At the center of it all was a confluence formed of two eternal forces, tugging at one another. One brewed with an austere yellow and glowed with pixels of dazzling light. They were like a nebula – foggy from afar, made of thousands of sparks.

The other churned with red, drawing everything into a maelstrom at its center. Although I did not know what it meant at first, a truth resounded deeply within me:

Something would blaze in the cosmos when the two arcane tongues are completed and adhered together.

As the lights impressed themselves upon me, my limbs grew gravid with tremors. My eyes blazed with vigor, and my fists clenched themselves tightly. It was as if a voice had called upon me within the garden of a holy temple.

"Ei'lara ... it's so beautiful ..." I said.

A sudden revelation struck me as I remembered Sha'ra's divination. Could this be the journey that she spoke of? Such beauty!

Perhaps, I might one day get the elements of this sacred tongue.

The visions soon ended. The once blistering radiance of the pond morphed from its various glitters into naught. Gazing into the puddle, I caught only a glimpse of two blue-skins glaring into it. Their eyes were aglow with both wonder and fright. Looking at me, Bebiu said, "Ei'lara and Kol'lara. They are like cosmic siblings for a purpose we've yet to unravel."

"Our seniors have spoken of the former as a strange language with many cosmic properties. However, where to get fragments of this tongue, I do not know."

"The Tsa'mara. They are said to hold elements of such. However, the skill to access the knowledge within remains as a mystery even to the most wizened."

"The Tsa'mara? Aren't those the strange obelisks that our elders spoke of?"

"Yes. I haven't cast my gaze upon them yet, and did love to someday."

"Then, that is the next destination we shall visit when we get a chance."

"I will be more than willing to accompany you to see them as well. There are also the Kol'mara – very similar edifices whose purpose has long been lost."

"If that is required to decipher and complete Ei'lara, then I'll be more than willing to oblige."

Once my purpose had concluded, I remembered the words of my father. I activated his scroll. With this, I uttered the following Kar into the pool:

Luu Ino'tosh Ga



The waters within the pond swirled. The pond revolved around its center with each passing second and formed a foam of bubbles and whirling waters. As it swirled with increasing speed, the air exploded with a frightful din. The once stagnant waters churned until they morphed into a froth of surging steam. Sweat doused our bodies.

Stepping back, the waters gushed upward. They formed a geyser of sizzling steam, which glowered with rage and morphed into shades of azure. The azure then glittered with hues of amethyst and lavender.

For a while, the pond took on the silhouette of a dancer and pranced vividly. Its shadows cast themselves upon the walls behind it. The shadows danced ever more fiercely as the waters revolved around its center.

Before I could do anything, something struck. The waters morphed into rivulets that gushed towards me. Like lances, they were thrust upon my skin. As its volatile contents scorched me, heat glazed my body. My eyes rolled upward, and I gasped for air.

A horrific ripple shuddered throughout my body and sent my limbs into a fit of frenzy. As I quivered helplessly, I found myself afloat as the waters unleashed their blistering heat upon me. I could not remember what had transpired. I only recalled the quavering of my voice as I desperately called out for help from my companion.

Darkness overtook me until the first glimmers of light entered the lids of my eyes. Gazing down, I saw Bebiu applying bandages filled with Vera to soothe whatever calamity assailed me.

"Rest, Ni'vim," said Bebiu. "Do not worry. I will take care of you and use the scrolls sent by your father to carry you home with a spell."

A terrible pain left me convulsed until the light of consciousness faded from me again.

An unknown time passed, and I awoke to the sweltering warmth of the twin suns above. Bebiu was beside me, applying aloe vera and water over my scathed skin.

"Am ... am I dead?" I asked.

"Far from it," Bebiu said. "Didn't you know Yao always said that it's our closeness to death that makes life more purposeful?"

"I ... felt that ..."

"Rest, Ni'vim. All will be well."

Another crushing pain left me spasming from within. Tears and saliva dripped from my face, and my muscles twitched. Bebiu's hands clasped me while I prayed every moment for my time to end. The twin suns cast their scorching heat on us, and I nearly burned. I gazed at my wounds, now mottled with blisters that almost oozed.

"We shouldn't have ... come!" I said.

"No, you mustn't give up here. Not until your purpose is done," said Bebiu.

Delirium overtook me, and I started mumbling nonsense. "What's ... the value of life? Am I even worth something?"

Bebiu gazed at me with a sparkle of innocence in his eyes. He held back a smile behind his frown and, as if half-chuckling, held back an insight.

"Well, its value will come from seeing the grand picture, of course!" He chuckled.

"What grand picture?" I turned to him with surprise.

"To see the end?"

"And what's the end?"

"I don't know. But didn't Yao once say it in class? The mystery of life is not one to be revealed but one to be taken. To see the end of our evolution. To see where it all goes."

I grimaced, and my limbs spasmed with such agony that sweat trickled from my body.

"I don't think ... I can hold on much further," I said.

"That's the beauty of life, isn't it? You don't need to do it alone. I'll shoulder you as far as I can."

I heard a whistle next to me, followed by the blurred afterimage of many gestures. I was afloat over a cushion of warm air, where a cloud of velvet white was below me.

"I used your father's magical scroll," said Bebiu. "Comes in handy now, isn't it?"

For several days, my consciousness alternated between darkness and occasional flickers of light. Pustules grew over my wounds, and the air stank with pus. My body was soaked with sweat, and food had nearly run thin. Although Bebiu did not tell me, I could see his face grimacing as if in shock.

"Leave me here," I said.

He turned to me with a fiery blaze in his eyes. Swinging his head side to side, he must have found my statement repulsive. Nightfall descended, and I had never seen Bebiu's calmness so shattered. Tremors shook his limbs while his eyes held back glimmering tears.

"Help is on its way," Bebiu said.

"I ... can't ... it hurts." My muscles twitched, and my breath was shallow.

Something crunched beneath Bebiu's feet. He lifted his feet and picked up a petal of vibrant pink.

"An *Ai'larasha zelkova* flower," said Bebiu.

"Wait ... what's that?" I asked.

"Zelkova flowers are normally tiny. Not so for the *Ai'larasha*. You can feel the caress of heaven in your hands." He passed me the flower, but its petals had flaked off.

"So fragile ... like mine ..."

"Oh, don't overthink it. *Please*."

The throes of death rang within me. It was louder than any clarion call. Every passing moment brought me closer to that irreversible passage where life fades into darkness.

Is life so sacred that it can withstand no tampering?

Is life so frail that a single step is all it takes to make it wither forever?

What can be the value of a zelkova flower if it wilts before it blooms?

Hundreds of pale pink flowers became gems in the air. As they nestled in the twin suns' rays, their petals glowed with a purple radiance. Like a hundred stars setting ablaze the skies, the flowers became a constellation.

"Wait ... what?" I asked.

The flowers landed on me. My frail fingers reached for one, and I felt its moisture. Scented, colorful, and brimming with life. Every gaze at it was a renewal of hope.

"See?" said Bebiu. "See what happens if you don't wait till you see the flower bloom? You miss out on its value."

I knew not what had fully transpired, but hours later, I was within reach of sanctuary. My father attended to me shortly after that.

"*Ni'vim*," my father said. "Do not worry. For what has happened is not something that you should be afraid of."

"What happened? I only remembered being scalded by steam and boiling waters," I asked.

"Rest now. Answers will come."

Within days of the calamity, I was once more able to walk upright. The glint of a silver surface shone at me. Then, I observed the silhouettes of my body, with its skins exposed to the lights of the suns. Looking into the mirror, I saw that my body had been branded with floral patterns. The epidermis of my skin had burned off, unveiling the grotesque transformation.

Although I was at first appalled at the change, my father said to me, "Ni'vim, what happened was simply the result of the spell I had asked you to cast upon the Su Ve Vi'hara. I have purposely arranged for the waters to carve these tattoos upon your body."

"Tattoos?"

"In time, Ni'vim, you will realize the importance of these markings on your body. They are Akortosha, which I have painstakingly carved onto you to facilitate the flows of Vi'la through them."

"The flows of Vi'la? I don't grasp."

"Vi'la flows through the meridians of this world and every living creature. With them, you can attune your body to achieve feats unimaginable by most people."

I did not understand what my father had installed for me back then. Again, I am inchoate and naive since I am only seventeen years of age. Regardless, I trust your endeavors, father.

After the trauma, I spent a day loitering with Yao by the golden coasts. The shores glittered with shades of pearl white and yellow. And the entire ocean abounded with crests and troughs. Many albatrosses and seagulls brushed their magnificent wings over the water as they scooped fish from it.

"You're troubled," said Yao as our feet embraced the sands. "I can see it in your eyes."

"When Bebiu brought me home on that day of near-death, I felt an emptiness colder than any winter within," I said.

"And that's supposed to be a bad thing?"

I turned to her with surprise while remaining silent. "How's that any good?"

Yao then reached for a silvery conch buried in the sand. She dusted it and then walked into the ocean. With a scoop, water filled the conch to the brim, and she returned.

"Just like this conch," she said, "emptiness lets us know there's still something to fill. It's a gift. It's life's greatest gift."

I turned away, watching the entire ocean wobble. The breeze on my back. The twin suns blazing high ahead while I nestled in their eternal warmth. Then, Yao patted me on my back.

"You see the entire ocean brimming ahead?" She pointed at the waters. "They're waiting to fill you, just as there's much purpose and meaning in life awaiting you."

I looked down with gloom, eyes almost teary.

"You need not be sad." Yao smiled. "Look at the ocean. It's not you looking at the waves. It's the entire ocean waving at you. You won't be alone. You don't need to seek value. Open your heart to the sea. The sea will come to you. And so shall your worth."

I stayed silent as we walked further.

"Oh," said Yao. "I almost forgot something." She got something from her pouch. A five-petaled flower bloomed from her hand as she opened it. It was the shine of the earth, the marvel of life, and the answer to despair. "An Ai'larasha zelkova flower. The largest Bebiu could find."

I grasped the flower and let its scent grace my nostrils. Every inhalation brought delight to me.

"Like this flower, life's short," she said. "Life's constantly adrift in the winds of change. Use it well before the end, or you will never bloom like this flower. Don't let life's frailty stop you."

"Thank you." I embraced her.

Once I reached home, I held the zelkova's flower again. A sudden spark illumined me within, and I twirled the flower by its stem. It floated with the winds and joined a meadow that sparkled with jade, indigo, and pink.

Life was no longer a mere blip in the expanse of eternity. It had become an infinite radiance in an eternal nightfall.

Although life is frail, the greatest sin is not bringing them to full blossom.

For many days, I got a book from my father's desk. Opening it, many words of wisdom brimmed within. *Ei'lara?*

Could this be the ocean that will fill my emptiness?

I do not know.

But my path is mine, not to be told, but to walk and grow into.

Life's valuable.

And I *shall not* let mine go to waste.

Notes:

Ni'vim is about under 18 years old, according to Leea'doch's calendrical system. However, due to slight differences in the

time length per week, month, and year, Ni'vim is actually slightly over 18 years old in Earth years in this chapter.

