

Zelkova, Burn

Raielas POV

A zelkova, once living and vibrant – *but no longer*.
Never has been.
Never will be.



A white mist surrounded me as I gazed into the violet skies of Sckogol. The churn of lava roiled, and threads of lustrous gold streaked across the heavens. I stared ahead, beholding the sprawl of various twigs and branches unfolding from a single trunk at the hill's top. The tree's leaves glowed with amethyst and cerulean, almost like how the skies used to be in this realm. Sultry winds gushed over us, and its leaves rustled, bending toward the gusts.

A flight of marbled steps led me high to the hill's apex. Alabaster and obsidian glazed its railings with shades of dismal black. With every step, my eyes gazed down, remaining cold outside but brooding within.

I had reached the top. Several tombstones accompanied the zelkova. Striations of black and silver aligned their edges, and I placed my hands atop them. A cold spread from my palms to my body as I gazed at their flat, rectangular shapes. None carried any names, but it did not matter, for only I knew.

Sitting beside one of them, a nightmare brewed within as every glory and malice entered my mind.

That creature promised us a world where we would be freed from the manacles of our lives. We would no longer be left with the throes of misery. We would flutter over fields of emerald, each overflowing with milk and honey. The being said, we would be all and one, with every void in between filled.

That creature lied.

I held my hands over the grave, eyes vacant without the slightest drop of tears, and my heart free of pulses. Its obsidian surface carried the burden of nightfall. And the bane of guilt lingered deep within the tomb. Seated next to it, I bowed for a moment of silence that paid homage to the person inside. And maybe to atone for whatever unholy covenant we once had.

I murmured his name.

A name that once meant everything to me.

Dear one, I remember telling you the dreaded woes of what fate would offer if we did not. The skies would be aglow with a darkness that blazes more brightly than any star. The oceans would brim with a swathe of cold, merciless shadows hotter than any magma chamber. And everyone would dread the throes of nihilism. But you would shoulder a curse far more heinous than most would have to shoulder. Not more than mine, and not more for *that* person.

We would never see the world as it was again. The winds would howl louder than any wolf, and our lives no less than a tragedy than the pretenses all others have put up with.

I remember.

Your every smile was a crescent etched upon my eyes, never to be cleansed. Your every laughter still echoes within me, and our every prance a quake reverberating into the infinite past and future.

On a day when the sky brimmed with bloodshot red, while the oceans were like scarlet spilled on its waves, blood dripped from our hands. Our blood gushed into each other's veins, becoming one with the other, binding yet silencing, compelling yet willing.

That blood of that unspeakable communion no longer courses through you and can no longer do.

It still does for me, but I can still choose either.

Now time cannot be reversed – only a baleful trudge towards a future I wished should never have been but has already come true.

I gleaned at several other tombstones before me, each speaking a verse as eternal as time itself. I'm sorry, for the fault is not yours.

It was mine.

But it had to be done.

At least you all no longer have to shoulder the burden.

A mirrored surface shone at me with slivers like the arms of the galaxy high at night. My eyes glinted at me, but they shed not a single pearl of water. They had all been shed.

They had *all* been shed.

Now my will is bound to my master. There is no escape, no possibility of redemption or reversal. My sins were my own, spelled on those glimmering eyes staring vacantly at me, unblinking yet unsure.

My fingers twirled and cast a string of luminous Kara. They swirled like ethers around the zelkova until its once rainbow leaves morphed into sickly white.

Something interrupted. A voice thundered in the skies as flaming symbols swirled and etched many signs on them. Every curl was a command and every gaze a defilement of my will.

"Raielas, it is time," thundered Kel'sora. "The pores in the spheres are enlarging, and many Sckogoloa now pour in great numbers into the other realm."

"The collision of worlds," I said.

"It's nearing. It's nearing. Can you *feel* it?"

"Every bit of it."

"Now, we must set forth the motion of what will soon define Leea'doch. *Begin the mission.* It shall be when the portals between the spheres are large enough."

"And it shall be." I bowed before the fiery symbols.

The crust drummed with the echoes of thousands of war cries all around me. The earth shook with every trot, and every trot turned into a stampede. The army rumbled. Pallor filled their faces, and I could sense their brutality and fear resounding within. Hundreds of chasms tore the air asunder, spilling gusts of air that howled like ravening wolves. They wobbled up and down and left and right; their sizes oscillated like the ocean waves.

Still not stable enough, but soon they will be.

A blaze of charring embers shot forth at the zelkova with another twirl of my fingers. Its leaves gleamed with a final shade of rainbow as though desperate to taste the flavors of life. The fire had displaced its leaves and turned it into a smothering miasma where every leaf had now become grilling ashes and smog. As flames consumed the tree, I stared solemnly at it, aware that none could ever reverse the act. With every swirl, fires pranced and glazed its trunk and gnarled roots with a swathe of orange.



Soon after, it leaned to the side, burning yet resolute. Yet with every char, its trunk soon cracked, and down came a thump upon the ground.

The zelkova has fallen.

The zelkova has fallen.

The zelkova has fallen.

