

## The Right to be Normal

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# The Right to be Normal

by [khals](#)

## Summary

The Warrior of Light, despite all titles and accolades, is still very much a person. Someone capable of truly mundane acts and experiences alongside the fanciful and unreal. When the world sees you as this hero who will save the world time and time again, sometimes you gotta fight tooth and nail just to be normal.

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Collection of short writings for FFXIVwrite 2020 about my WoL, Moriko Kimura. Some of it is ship related, other parts are not. Timeline jumps all over the place. Contains 5.0 and beyond spoilers.

## Notes

Jumped on this challenge as a way to needle myself back into consistent writing since I still have things to finish and other stuff I want to start down the line. I also just really like writing and talking about characters so what better way to just do it without getting too wrapped up in how polished it is. Enjoy my ramblings about my cat girl.

## Crux

It was like time had stood still.

Moriko stood there, golden eyes wide in bewilderment. Her hand was raised, frozen in its attempt to press against Sidurgu's arm.

"You heard me," he replied. He looked away from the miqo'te woman, arms crossed and a permanent scowl etched across his features. "For your sake, it may be best if we are *not* seen out in public together."

"What in kami's name is that even supposed to *imply*, Sidurgu?" Moriko drew her arm back, hand balled in a tight fist against her chest.

She shivered and it wasn't the Ishgardian cold nipping through her clothes.

"There's enough adversity in your life. I'd rather not add onto it by association."

Moriko drew back, almost like she'd been struck. "By asso-- Are you daft? Is that why you squirrel away in the Brume at all hours of the day?" She narrowed her eyes, pinned him with a heated stare that he refused to acknowledge. "What are you afraid of?"

"Nothing," Sidurgu replied in a clipped tone.

*Don't raise your voice, Moriko. Be calm. You can stay composed.*

"You can't avoid this, Sidurgu. You started this conversation and I intend to finish it." Her chest felt tight. She ran her fingers through her long hair. "I want to know what you're thinking. This is kind of important."

Sidurgu finally spared her a sideways glance. "A prolific diplomat and a man of my caliber seen together. In public. I think you're smart enough to piece it together."

She ran her hand down her face. "Sidurgu..."

"I've made up my mind."

Moriko groaned in frustration. "You stubborn, stubborn man!" she exclaimed. If no one was aware of them before, tucked away in the dark corner, they were now. "Do you honestly think my concern is what *others* think? I've been through much worse than what a few stuck up nobles would think seeing us only a few ilms apart. *Honestly*."

Sidurgu dropped his arms. If she didn't know any better, he almost looked embarrassed. *Almost*.

"I'd rather tread carefully around the stuck up nobles if it's well and good by you."

With a dramatic sigh, Moriko plopped herself into a nearby chair. “Just once, I’d like things to be easy and straightforward.”

“I believe Ishgard is the wrong place for that.”

# Sway

## Chapter Summary

An origin story for a refugee fleeing an occupied country who goes from mundane individual to eventual savior of the world, whether she realizes it or not.

## Chapter Notes

I've had this origin story idea for a while so kinda happy I managed to find some way to just slap it down into words despite any roughness.

Moriko had never been on a ship before.

It was such a foreign feeling. Despite standing on a solid surface, it didn't feel that way. The constant swaying and rocking gave the experience a learning curve she hadn't anticipated. She'd heard so many stories about boats and the adventures held upon them. This wasn't one of those grandiose tales. Moriko was on a journey, but there was nothing exciting about it.

Instead, she spent her time huddled below deck in a corner to keep from being underfoot. While she wasn't a stowaway, she certainly felt like one. The crew hardly paid her any mind and the reservations weren't particularly glamorous. She'd been given a dingy cot and the most paltry of meals so decidedly foreign, it was almost overwhelming.

But being a refugee wasn't supposed to be fun. It was scary. Especially considering the last image she had of home was watching her father flee from a Garlean patrol. He drew their attention just so his daughter could sneak aboard the trade vessel as per agreement.

The gentle rocking of the waves did little to alleviate the anxiety building in her chest.

*'Stop thinking about it.'*

Moriko jerked up, golden eyes wide in shock. "T-Tama...!" she stammered. She lowered her voice, "Sorry."

A little fox hopped into the cot with her. He eyed the scratchy piece of fabric that was supposedly a blanket with disdain. The dim light caught his orange fur, causing it to shimmer.

*'Do not squander your gift dwelling on the past. It's pointless.'*

Moriko looked up and checked her surroundings. It was rare that any of the crew would approach her outside of meal time, but it couldn't hurt to be safe. She still wasn't entirely sure if the fox's voice was only present within her mind, or if others could hear him.

"I can't help it," she finally whispered. "How do you expect me to forget."

*'Not forget,' Tama huffed. 'Remember all you want, but do not dwell. You have a lot to look forward to, child.'*

Her face felt hot and her chest tight as she bit her lip. Moriko looked down and bore holes into her hands. Moisture pooled in her eyes.

"It's...it's a lot, though."

Tama ceased his bristling. His ears folded back as he momentarily closed his eyes. He hopped into the girl's lap and curled into a ball. *'I am sure...he is well.'*

Despite his best intentions, the sentiment felt awkward.

"Couldn't you have done something?" Moriko asked. She ran her hand over Tama's fur.

*'It is my duty to protect you, and only you.'*

She didn't respond. An uncomfortable silence settled on the two, broken only occasionally by the creaking wood of the boat. This was really her new life. The realization hadn't hit her until that moment. Her shoulders felt heavy. Uprooting herself in the middle of an occupation in order to start a new life on an entirely different continent felt like a lot to place on someone who was just barely an adult but here she was.

What was she even supposed to do once they docked? The crew would more than likely send her off on her own with no direction. She had no money to her name and no one to rely on other than herself. The anxiety in her chest grew. The thought of having to rely on herself was a terrifying one. Tama's soft fur kept the panic at bay.

*'You should sleep,' he spoke, breaking her thoughts.*

Moriko mumbled an incoherent response and laid down on the cot. It wasn't a comfortable sleep.

Tama's growling woke her.

Moriko sat up and rubbed the sleep from her eyes. It was still dark. "Tama," she whispered. Her hands groped through the air and over the moth-eaten sheets in an attempt to find the animal and quiet him down lest he were discovered. Her struggle was cut short well before it began.

An intense pain struck her chest blossomed outward. She grasped at her shirt, gasping for breath. Her insides burned. Moriko slipped a hand under her shirt and ran the pads of her fingers over the raised magical scar. It was hot. Any remnant of sleep was driven away as her senses focused in her panic.

Above her on the deck, there were heavy footsteps and screams. Moriko forced herself to her feet and made her way toward the stairs, nearly collapsing along the way. There was smoke and fire in the air. She could smell it over the salt of the sea. As she finally breached the top, Moriko was treated to the sight of a red sky. It was broken up with golden ribbon-like light that stretched as far as she could see.

The energy connected with the horizon and set it ablaze. A shockwave pushed back from the explosion, across the water. In turn, it created a wave. The wave of water rose high and touched the crimson sky. The screams of the sailors were drowned out by the roar of a dragon that rose into the clouds. Moriko watched it stretch out its wings before the tidal wave obscured its body.

The water hit the boat and swallowed her into darkness.

*'Hear...Feel...Think...'*

Moriko groaned. Her eyes were heavy. The voice coaxed her awake, but she had no idea who was speaking. That couldn't be Tama. The voice sounded soft, gentle. Her limbs were heavy and her body drenched. Her mind was nothing more than a fog. When she finally managed to open her eyes, she was greeted with the sun hanging high above her.

The sky was blue.

Sand stuck to her dark skin. She could taste it in her mouth, but couldn't be bothered by it. Moriko parted her lips, tried to call back. Nothing escaped but a pathetic whine. All she could hear was the gentle lapping of the ocean waves and the faint cawing of sea birds.

Her only company was the splintered wreckage of the boat she had ridden to the west.

# Muster

## Chapter Summary

The eve of the Battle for Ala Mhigo has arrived.

## Chapter Notes

This was such a weird word to work with because I honestly wasn't sure what it meant until I looked it up whoopsie.

Base camp was alive with the continual sounds of heavy marching and swords clashing. It was still a strange sight, seeing Ishgardian knights mingling with the troops of the three Grand Companies. Moriko sat perched on a crate by her tent and watched the training. The tension was palpable.

Ala Mhigo stood in the distance. Its buildings faded to silhouette as the sun crept behind the towering walls. Tomorrow they'd storm the city and purge the Garlean plague, allowing the native born citizens to reclaim their birthrights. Zenos was in there, waiting for them. Waiting for her.

Her eyes focused on a glint of steel as a sword and spear met, their owners struggling for the upper hand in their practiced spar. She could only think of the katanas her blonde haired rival wielded. It wasn't a city Moriko would be walking into tomorrow - it was a lion's den. Her tail idly flicked against the crate.

The sun had long disappeared by the time she stood from her perch and entered the cobbled together tent for the night. An armor stand had been placed next to her temporary bed. It held her battle gear, patched and shined. Moriko crawled atop the cot and rolled onto her back, staring at the dull green fabric ceiling of her tent.

Throughout the night, more soldiers arrived periodically and took their turns preparing for the upcoming battle. Moriko barely slept. Whenever she closed her eyes, she only saw a twisted smile.



# Clinch

## Chapter Summary

Moriko is a diplomat who specifically works with friendly Spoken tribes to help rebuild relations with the major city-states. It's not an easy job. There's always some resistance.

## Chapter Notes

oops a little behind because i am time blind

i spent two hours trying to figure out what to the name the lalafell only for it not to really matter

“My proposal is that you allow the Silver Fang tribe to migrate into Central Thanalan and build a new home out in Hellsbrood Holes. The beasts that once infested Cutter’s Cry exist no more and no one has a done thing with those lands. With this in play, both parties will be satisfied,” Moriko said as she hunched over the meeting table. Her gloved finger tapped the part of the map she referred to for emphasis before she looked up to gauge her audience’s reactions.

Nanamo Ul Namo sat at the head of the table, her arms neatly folded in her lap. By her side stood Raubahn, Immortal Flames general and personal friend to the Warrior of Light. In any other case, it would seem rather unusual and unnecessary to have such prestigious figures present for a run of the mill meeting.

But this wasn’t a run of the mill meeting.

Across from Moriko sat two lalafell men. The Lolonen Brothers, as they preferred to be called. A pair of tradesmen whose family had been in the business for generations where time was money. Even though they weren’t twins, the two excelled at mirroring one another. They sported matching scowls and crossed arms. Their eyes bore holes into Moriko.

“If those crazed beasts have been killed off, then why should we give up perfectly new land to a whole new host of animals to move in and potentially wreck the place,” the eldest, Kokonen, spat. He had a shrill voice that made Moriko want to plug her ears. She fought the urge.

*Be cordial. Keep your tail relaxed,* she coached herself.

“With all due respect, Kokonen,” Nanamo spoke, “I would appreciate it if you did not refer to our *Spoken* friends as animals. Please, carry on.” Her voice was as soft as Moriko remembered.

Kokonen grimaced, but kept his mouth shut. He chose to direct his ire on the miqo'te woman before him. The younger brother remained silent, seemingly more content letting the eldest handle all the legwork.

“Why are you so interested in this land?” Moriko asked, attempting to direct the conversation back on track.

“It’s not really any of your concern. I agree to this little meeting, but I do not need to explain to an *outsider* what I intend to use *my* land for. I suppose if I have to say anything, though, it’s for business.” Kokonen crossed his arms and nodded with a huff.

“Business?” she asked, tilting her head. The insult flung at her rolled off her shoulders.

“You heard me. Or are those ears of yours only for show?”

She closed her eyes, a small smile tugging at her lips. “My apologies. I just wanted the clarification.” There was an unlabeled folder by her side. She slid it forward and pulled out its contents. “You see, it’s funny you mention you want the land for business despite the fact that you’re already engaged in business expansion.”

Kokonen paled. “I...how would you know that? You have no proof.”

From the folder, Moriko withdrew a few papers: an invoice, another map, and what appeared to be a signed contract. She pushed them toward the two lalafell. “From the records I gathered, it appears that you are, in fact, in the middle of expansion. Correct me if I’m wrong, Kokonen, but isn’t it *illegal* to seek additional land to hoard on for future expansion. Something about finishing what you have in the moment. Not to mention that the law *also* states that whatever new venture you’ve invested into needs to prove it’s stability before you seek additional avenues.”

For the first time that meeting, Kokonen slid his eyes away from Moriko. He peered at the papers before him, scowl deepening. “How did you get these?” he spat. “Is this a set up?”

Moriko stood back, face blank. “Public record. The competition in Ul’dah is cutthroat, if I remember correctly. Transactions like these, if legal at least, are freely available to request if you know what you’re looking for.”

“May I?” Nanamo broke the tension. She held her small hand out toward Kokonen, gesturing to the papers before him. Without a word, he slid them her way.

The silence stretched on as the sultan checked over the evidence provided. Moriko, despite all her bravado, held a heavy anxiety in her chest. She wasn’t trying to be cruel with her pointed attack. From what she’d found, the Lolonen were a decently successful family. They could afford to pass on one piece of land.

“I have to agree with Moriko. She is correct in our laws,” Nanamo said, setting the paperwork down. She folded her arms across her lap once more.

“Would you consider the land still free, then?” Moriko tentatively asked.

The sultan nodded, a small smile on her face.

Moriko dipped her hand into her pocket and withdrew a square of parchment that she unfolded. It was wrinkled and a little torn but revealed itself to be a haphazardly scrawled letter of request. She slid it forward.

“This is a formal request from the Silver Fang tribe. They would like to make the abandoned nests their home and have promised full cooperation with the locals if allowed,” Moriko explained. She put on her best diplomatic voice to mask her anxiety. “Once they’re comfortably settled, they will offer their metalworking skills whenever needed.”

“I see,” Nanamo replied. She picked up the crumpled letter and read over its contents.

“You cannot be serious,” Kokonen gasped. “You seek to invite these wild beasts so close to our homes?” He pointed a finger at Moriko.

She ignored his outburst. “They apologize for the state of their request. It was a bit sudden and they didn’t have a lot of materials on hand.”

“That’s quite alright. Raubahn, could you hand me a quill and ink, please?” Nanamo asked. The tall man by her side nodded quietly before reaching to procure the requested items.

“Thank you. Moriko, please give the Silver Fang tribe my regard. The lands are theirs to use. Raubahn will take it from here.”

With her signature penned and the matter settled, Nanamo bowed her head before hopping out of her chair and heading out the door. The meeting was finished. Moriko had accomplished what she had wanted. Her anxiety had lifted, replaced with an intense warmth.

# Matter of Fact

## Chapter Summary

Sidurgu and moogles do not mix.

## Chapter Notes

slowly catching up aaaaa

“Why you choose to associate with such insufferable creatures is beyond me,” Sidurgu seethed with such contempt.

Once more, the day found Moriko Kimura, fabled *Warrior of Light* within the sequestered walls of the great city of Ishgard. The chilled winds had chased her inside. She was far too used to warmer climates. Despite living within these walls and conducting frequent business with its people, Moriko could never build up the proper resistance to the permanent winter that draped across the Coerthan landscape.

Kugane’s winters were cold, but limited. As a child, her mother had always reassured her that the beautiful bleakness that came with the frigid temperatures was never a permanent fixture in their lives. The coming warmth of the following spring would drive away the snow. Ishgardian children had no such luxuries. She wondered how people grew up in such an unforgiving climate.

The frozen winds had chased Moriko into her favorite haunt. The Forgotten Knight. There once was a time when her feet would guide her towards the Fortempts Manor upon every visit to Ishgard. Over time, she’d weaned herself from that place. Edmont had been firm in his offer that despite the end of the Dragonsong War, she was always welcome within his house, but she could only offer a flimsy promise that she would take him up on that when it was needed.

Her golden eyes locked onto the au ra man by her table’s side. “Just because you had one bad experience with them, Sidurgu, does not mean they are *insufferable*,” Moriko replied. Before her lay the contents of her bag: normal provisions like food, a compass, and traveling bag. There was also an unnecessary amount of kupo nuts left in a haphazard pile.

Sidurgu eyed the currency. “I see they have you at their beck and call. Have you truly lowered your standards so far?”

“I think they’re nice,” Rielle, soft as a dove, spoke up. She sat on the edge of her bed with Moriko’s topaz carbuncle in her lap. The young elezen girl patted its head while the creature’s tiny tongue hung out of its mouth with a dopey expression upon its simple face.

Sidurgu managed to calm his bristling facade for only a moment before he scoffed. “Bah. Just hope the little shites aren’t swindling you.”

“They’re not. The moogles are nothing more than...co-workers. I’m just lending them, and the dragons, a hand,” Moriko responded with a flick of her ears. She folded her map and set her compass atop it.

“Then...do not overwork yourself, either. If they’re pushing too hard, tell me. I’ll make my way over to their little haven and rip the poms from their heads.”

Moriko snorted before promptly covering her mouth. “The gesture is noted and appreciated, but please do not storm Moghome looking for me.”

Rielle giggled from her spot. The carbuncle looked up at her and pawed the girl’s wrist. She obliged to the creature’s request and ran her hand atop its golden fur, ensuring to scratch behind the long, floppy ears.

Sidurgu folded his arms and scowled. His tail flicked in annoyance. It was an extremely rare, once in a lifetime sight to behold. But, Moriko mused, she supposed it was the tiniest of signs that he was comfortable around them. Holed away in their rented room within The Forgotten Knight.

# Vulnerability

## Chapter Summary

Trust is just a slippery slope to vulnerability.

In order to live in Ishgard, you had to be tough. Physical strength, while valued, couldn't win all your battles. You had to be guarded and ever aware of the people around you. The people of Ishgard had funny ways of hiding ulterior motives. A friendly face was the easiest way to disguise nefarious intentions. Too many snakes pretending to be saints.

That was a lesson Sidurgu Orl learned early in his life in the hardest way imaginable.

Everything he'd ever had was torn from his hands. All of it borne from misguided zeal toward a religion he'd known nothing about. The people that took his family, his world as he had known it, had the privilege to walk away from their mistake. Heads high with the certainty they'd done the right thing regardless of whether that was true or not.

Sidurgu didn't have that. All he had was the tattered remains of a forgotten world at his feet and a festering resentment for the people he'd eventually come to live with.

From that day forth he'd erected walls around himself. He struck out on a path to make himself into the savior he wished he'd had on that horrific day. Never did he want a child to suffer what he had. Even if it cost him his last breath, Sidurgu Orl would be damned if an innocent suffered as he had.

Imagine his surprise when *the* Warrior of Light showed up at his doorstep. It was difficult to not hear her name throughout the winding streets. Everywhere he stepped, her praises followed. He wasn't afraid to admit that he'd become distrustful of a woman he hadn't even met.

The picture painted of her was a haughty woman too obsessed with the idea of sticking her nose into everyone's business. Like she was owed some kind of twisted satisfaction at the very idea of helping people. He was sorely convinced she did what she did for the praise alone and nothing more. After all, this was Ishgard, and no one ever did anything without some sort of ulterior motive. It was only a matter of finding out what hers was.

Yet the day they met, any assurances Sidurgu had that he knew exactly what kind of woman Moriko Kimura was evaporated into the chilled air the moment his teal eyes laid upon her. This was no overzealous woman.

She stood there, arms wrapped around herself and eyes nervously taking in the room around her. Her dark orange hair, streaked with blonde, contrasted brightly against her dark skin. Sidurgu tried to convince himself it was an act. It *had* to be. But the longer he stared at her,

the more he became convinced no one, not even the greatest actor, could replicate such blatant fear.

For that's what showed in her golden eyes. Despite her best efforts to appear put together, Sidurgu found a deep, unsettling fear. It was only natural, he argued within. Tales of grandeur followed every step Moriko took. Great acts of heroism weren't always free. There was always some price to pay. The question was, what had the Warrior of Light paid to end the Dragonsong War after all these years.

There was something strangely familiar about her that he couldn't put his finger on. He swore there was some sort of aura about her, something intangible that called out to him, drew him closer. He did his damndest to ignore the feeling churning in his gut.

The logical part of his mind warned against falling for her facade. For the first time in his life, he pushed it aside and offered his cooperation to this deeply troubled woman.

# Nonagenarian

## Chapter Summary

Everyone grows old. What's the world's greatest hero going to do when her bones are too brittle to carry on?

“What do you think you’re going to do really old and can fight no longer?”

Alisaie peered up from her book. She sat up straight and leveled Moriko with a quizzical look. “Why the sudden curiosity?” she asked.

The Rising Stones was quiet for once. While it was still fairly occupied with its usual loiterers, the lack of audible conversation was a welcomed change. Alphinaud had gone off to do gods knew what, leaving his snarkier twin under Moriko’s watchful eye. The woman in question laid back against her chair, head tilted back and eyes on the ceiling.

“Just thinking,” she spoke.

“Well if you’re ‘just thinking,’ do you think you could keep it to yourself,” Alisaie retorted, turning her gaze back upon her interrupted reading.

“Sorry,” Moriko muttered, sitting up straight and adjusting herself into a more acceptable seated position. “It was sort of a serious question. I don’t mean to bother you.”

Alisaie sighed. She resigned herself to shutting the tome in her hands. This wouldn’t be a short conversation considering the tone in Moriko’s voice. “What was the question again?”

Moriko fidgeted. “What’re you going to do when you’re really old, and cannot fight any longer?”

“That is an oddly specific question, Moriko. What brought this on?”

Moriko’s ears flattened against her skull. “Well...I was thinking--”

“Which is always a dangerous thing for you to,” Alisaie interrupted. She snorted and lifted a hand. “Sorry, sorry. Continue.”

Moriko sighed. “I guess what I’m trying to get at is...what are you...we going to do when the fighting’s over.” Despite her eyes locked on Alisaie, she saw through her companion. Stared at nothing. “What do we do once the world is saved and has fixed itself and we’re no longer needed.”



“I never really pinned you as the philosophical type. This sounds like something you should be asking Y’shtola or Urianger.” Alisaie paused and fingered the pointed corners of her book covering. “Alphinaud would no doubt have a better response than I with his endless wealth of knowledge. I’m sure he’s thought about it tenfold. Probably has numerous plans on hand as well.”

“But I’m not asking them. I’m asking *you* .”

The pointed note in Moriko’s voice started Alisaie. She jumped, the slightest movement. Suddenly flustered, the young elezen girl looked away. “Right...right, you’re asking me,” she mumbled. “I suppose...hm...maybe I’d travel the world proper. It would be nice to take in the sights around me for once opposed to having my mind clouded with ways to fix the current disaster.”

Moriko nodded. Her tail flicked behind her. “But nothing concrete from the sounds of it.”

Alisaie shrugged. “I’m not sure what you want me to say.” Her eyes met Moriko’s once more.

It was Moriko’s turn to feel flustered. “I don’t know either. It is a little reassuring to hear that someone else is floundering as much as I am with this hypothetical scenario.”

“You? *Floundering* ? You’ve never floundered in your life,” Alisaie laughed.

“You’d be surprised. I’m just good at hiding it.”

“Okay then, so what are *you* going to do once all of this,” Alisaie vaguely gestured with her hand, “is all said and done? What will the great Warrior of Light do once the world no longer needs saving and she’s far too old to lift her weapons any longer?”

Moriko was relieved to feel the stress of her own question leave her shoulders. She laughed into her hand. “Maybe I’ll pick up fishing again.”

“Don’t you hate fishing?”

“I do, but it teaches patience.”

Alisaie propped her elbow onto the table and rested her chin in her hand. “You’re already a wealth of patience. Why would you need even more?”

“Look, don’t ask me. Fishing is what a lot of elder people enjoy so I might as well do as they do and learn to enjoy it.”

The corners of Alisaie’s lips quirked upward. Her eyes twinkled with mirth. “You’ve never been good at following crowds.”

The two laughed.

# Clamor

## Chapter Summary

The parallels between the First and her home are almost too jarring.

## Chapter Notes

makes time in-between crying over expert crafting to write

The Crystarium was a foreign city, but it's sights and sounds harbored such a strong familiarity to Moriko. The feeling was near overwhelming. One hundred years under the oppressive brilliance of the shimmering light sky did little to deter its citizens as they milled about their days. The Exarch had gone out of his way to give her a personal tour, a gesture she'd thanked him for. If he hadn't paused his day for her, Moriko was sure she'd be lost amidst the new sights.

It was a beautiful place between the meticulously manicured landscapes and the architecture of the buildings. The Crystal Tower looming over like an ever silent guardian added a quaint touch. She'd met some of the locals during her little trip across the city, but most seemed content watching her from a distance. Not that she could blame them. The people here seemed close knit.

The Exarch guided her to a quieter nook in the city. Moriko saw a couple of fenced off areas that sported stacks of hay in the corner. The strange, dark green feathered creatures she'd caught glimpses of during her brief stay on the First thus far came into view.

"I figured you'd want to visit here for a moment," the Exarch spoke from her side.

She flicked an ear in his direction, her lips quirking into a lopsided grin. The Amaro appeared to be this world's version of Chocobo, but the similarities stopped and started with their dark eyes and overall avian look. Moriko quietly approached the fence and laid her hands upon the wooden structure. She was oddly nostalgic for the birds at the home despite not really growing up with them. The majority of them kept to themselves and gave her a wide berth.

"My lord, I wasn't expecting a visit."

Moriko drew her eyes away and pinned them to the speaker. She was startled by the sight. They were Amal'jaa, but not. The black scales of their body were draped with silvered fur.

Aside from that, they were a near perfect match to the Spoken of Thanalan. She drew her gaze downward.

The Exarch drew close to Morikos side and raised his free hand. "I was just guiding our new guest through the city and she mentioned wanting to see the Amaro."

Moriko chanced a glance at his hooded face. There was the faintest hint of a smirk.

The not-Amal'jaa stood tall, his barrelled chest jutting outward. "She has good taste. Our birds are some of the best."

"This is Szem Djenmai, one of the keepers that tends to the Amaro," the Exarch explained. "And this is Moriko Kimura."

"Hello," Moriko greeted the keeper.

"A pleasure to make your acquaintance. You look as though you've never seen one before," Szem gestured to the dark green bird by his side.

Moriko wasn't sure how to respond. It wasn't Amaro's appearance that had left her wide eyed and curious. It was *him*.

"Uh, y-yeah," she sputtered. The dark skin of her face grew warm from her embarrassment.

"Well if you have any questions, I will most happily answer them," Szem replied with a bow of his head.

She nodded and wracked her brain for anything that didn't pertain to what he was. To her relief, the Exarch came to her rescue throughout the conversation and supplied questions of his own. Whether it was because her floundering was obvious or not, he dare not say.

When enough time had passed, the pair bid Szem Djenmai farewell and left him to tend to the animals in his care.

"He was like an Amal'jaa...the Spoken live in the city? And they get along?" Moriko quitedly said as they made their way toward the Pendants.

"Like the 'Amal'jaa?" the Exarch asked. He brought his non-crystalized hand to his chin in clear thought. "I haven't the slightest who they are, but I assume they're similar to our friend?"

"Sorry, they're Spoken from the uh...the Source." Calling her home by a different name was still a foreign feeling on her tongue. "They look almost the same just...they're not allowed in the city."

The Exarch made a thoughtful sound. "That is quite unfortunate."

"It is." Moriko looked up. "I'm trying to convince people to change that. They don't really like to listen."

“Ah, yes. The politics. Lucky for us, politics stopped mattering the day the world flooded with light.”

The way he'd said that caused Moriko to glance at him from the corner of her eye once more. Ever since she'd arrived, there was this feeling in her gut that the hooded man shrouded in mystery held some sort of familiarity to her. She hadn't been able to pin it, but he seemed so certain in his tone. Almost as if he was *familiar* with her struggle.

“That's right...the politics,” she slowly replied.

That would have to be a mystery for another day. The Pendants came into view. Knowing that she'd be resting shortly made her body feel heavy. Who knew flying across realms could be so exhausting.

# Lush

## Chapter Summary

Regardless of how busy you are, sometimes it's good to take a breath and catch up with old friends.

Sitting on the plush sofa of House Fortempts and listening to the gentle clinking of tea cups brought Moriko a comforting sense of familiarity she wasn't aware she had. Her fingers ran over the soft material covering the cushion. How long had it been since she visited?

The servant finished setting up the tea. He bowed his head and slipped away, out of sight, leaving Moriko and the head of the House alone in the den. The silence was interrupted by the gentle popping from the nearby fireplace. It bathed them in a comfortable warmth.

"It's always so good to see you," Edmont stated. He lifted his cups to his lips and took a quiet sip.

Moriko leaned forward and grabbed her own cup. She allowed the porcelain to warm her palms, content to look at the liquid for the moment. She hummed in response. "The gods were kind enough to grant me spare time. I figured the least I could do was stop by for a visit."

The elder man nodded, eyes closed. "As you should. We're always pleased to be in your company."

Her face grew warm. She lifted her cup to her lips and sipped at her drink.

"Will you be off to see your friend after your visit here?"

Moriko looked up, ears twitching. "Friend?"

A knowing smile grew on Edmont's lips. "Down in The Forgotten Knight." He took another sip.

She nearly dropped her cup. Was this the true Ishgardian noble experience? Gossiping over tea? There was something hidden in the man's words, exposed only through his tone.

"I...he...I don't know." For once, she was at a loss for words. Had they been *that* obvious.

Edmont chuckled. "It's quite alright. Strange fellow he is. Always skulking in the shadows."

Moriko bowed her head, hoping to hide her embarrassment. "He has his reasons," she replied meekly.

“I wasn’t insinuating otherwise.” Edmont paused to take another sip of his tea. “He was ever present by your side when you were recovering from your injury.”

She raised her head, eyes wide. “Wait, Sidurgu came by?”

Edmont nodded. “Not many knew. Someone had tipped him off, though I have my suspicions if the grapevine is to be believed.” His eyes met hers. “He never stayed too long, but he stopped by often.”

The aftermath of Ghimlyt Dark had been a haze for Moriko. Her clearest memory before blacking out was facing Zenos, or who she *believed* was Zenos. There was a red hot pain and then everything had gone dark. After an indeterminate amount of time, she’d woken up in Ishgard of all places. The most she’d been told was Estinien had been the one to spirit her away before, in typical Estinien fashion, disappearing once more.

She hadn’t been aware Sidurgu had stopped by to check on her.

Her heart felt full and her face hot. Despite the warmth of the cup, her hands were a little clammy. She desperately wanted to broach the subject with him, but knew he wouldn’t be willing to admit his concerns.

“He’d be happy for you, you know.”

Moriko came back to her senses, eyes focusing on Edmont once more. There was an almost sad smile on his face.

“He? ...Oh, right.” The realization dawned on her. She looked back down at her near empty cup. Her index finger traced the intricate patterns on the porcelain. A small pit welled in her stomach.

“That boy would have been by your side every waking moment and upon discovering your *friend*,” Edmont paused for a moment, almost mulling over his next words. He chuckled. “He’d congratulate you endlessly.”

Her heart fluttered. “Yeah...”

Edmont raised his head and looked to the portrait of Haurchefant that was mounted above the fireplace mantle. “Would you care to stay the night? I know you’re a busy woman, but I’m sure the boys would enjoy having you over for dinner once more. For old time’s sake.”

“I...yeah. That’d be nice,” Moriko replied. For a moment, she wanted to decline. Come up with some excuse that work was calling. The world could wait a night.

“If you’d like, you could invite your friend as well. I’m sure he wouldn’t deny a hot meal.”

Moriko sputtered, pulling a hearty laugh from the elder man.

# Avail

## Chapter Summary

The Warrior of Light wishes only to be helpful in these trying times, or so she claims.

## Chapter Notes

I write about expert crafting to cope with expert crafting. :')

“Ah! No, come on, I was close with that one!” Moriko whined.

In her hands lay the tattered remains of what was *supposed* to be an apron, but thanks to a streak of bad luck, the garment was destined to never see its completion. The woman sighed and set the cloth aside in a designated discard pile. Maybe it could find use elsewhere.

Currently holed away in her home out in the desert oasis of The Goblet, Moriko Kimura squirreled herself away in the basement level where the bulk of her crafted work took form. Scattered around in various boxes atop her work bench perched several boxes, each neatly labeled with the necessary materials for her craft. She'd long since shed her battle armor in favor of more comfortable attire suited for hours of delicate needlework.

“Okay, this one we won't let explode,” she muttered to herself.

Moriko grabbed handfuls of the materials and got to work. Sweat beaded on her brow as she bit her lip and focused all of her attention on the item before her.

*'Is she...is she always like this?'*

Off in the corner, the other personalities that inhabited Moriko's body took spectered forms. Ardbert, past Warrior of Light and overall man new to the general idea of sharing a corporeal form with another being, stood bewildered at the sight of the famed Warrior of Darkness hunched over a desk, quietly cursing at inanimate objects. He blinked several times to ensure what he saw was, in fact, a reality.

*'I'm afraid so.'*

By his side, the abyssal shade, clad head to toe in pitch black armor referred to only as *Fray* stood with their arms crossed. He eyed the miqo'te woman with such an air of exhaustion.

*'She never learns.'*

Moriko had long since learned to tune out the additional voices holed up within her. It was an experience wholly unique to herself and one she dared not seek counsel for. Typically the two were quiet, but once in a while they'd feel the urge to be chatty. Her ears flicked in their general direction.

*'Aren't there...better things to be doing right now?'* Ardbert whispered.

*'According to her, this endless struggle is meant to be a means to help the people of Ishgard. I have yet to be proven otherwise,'* Fray sighed in response.

"No, no, no! Please don't break! I can salvage this, if I just, uh..." Moriko panicked.

*'I...see,'* Ardbert said. *'Remind me again what she seeks to accomplish with this?'*

Their host had knocked over a box of pins, scattering them across the carpet. Moriko squeaked and attempted to gather them back into their container.

Fray uncrossed their arms before lifting them and performing a series of air quotes. *'To help,'* they said with a deadpan tone.

Moriko managed to contain her self-inflicted chaos before resuming her craft. She struggled through the last few steps before it inevitably exploded, the apron unable to be salvaged. A loud *thunk* echoed through the room as Moriko slammed her forehead into her desk.



# Ultracrepidarian

## Chapter Summary

It's all over yet she has to wonder if it was the right thing to do.

## Chapter Notes

contains 5.0 spoilers. i just slapped down words and hoped for the best. extremely short as i did some floundering with this prompt :'))

Once more, the fate of a world had been secured and its path removed from impending doom thanks to the valiant efforts of the Warrior of Darkness and her rag tag group of friends. Night had been returned to the first. For the first time in a hundred years, the native residents could look up to the vast inky expanse and see first hand twinkling stars that for most were only heard of in forgotten tales. Emet-Selch's plot had been halted in its tracks and the ascian, in turn, was vanquished. The culmination of events should have been cause for celebration.

Yet instead, Moriko lay in her bed within the Pendants, eyes pointed toward the ceiling. Her heart was heavy and a deep pit of trepidation weighed her down.

The sounds of celebration that drifted through her opened windows went unheard, drowned out by a faint ringing in her ears. Rest would have been a wise decision, but Moriko found herself too afraid to close her eyes. Any attempt had led to the burning landscape of Amaurot appearing in the forefront of her mind. The screams of its citizens and the fear they'd felt in their last moments had haunted her. She wasn't given the time to process it all, going from one fight to another.

But now that Emet-Selch, Hades, was vanquished, Moriko had all the time in the world until the next impending crisis reared its ugly head.

She pushed herself into a seated position and drew her legs in, resting her chin upon her knees. There was a little thought, deep in the back of her mind, that wondered if they'd truly done the right thing. Obviously they had. Emet-Selch was a persuasive man and was devoted to his cause, but no matter how passionate he was, in the end, the price he called for was far too steep. Moriko sighed. Still, there remained that part of her that wanted to fix the suffering she'd witness in the fiery memory of Amaurot. But there was nothing to be fixed as it was all only a figment of what once was.

She dug her nails into the fabric of her pants. Fray was right. She did need to step away from the hero persona once in a while before it consumed her.

# Tooth and Nail

## Chapter Summary

When your world has been flipped upside down, all you can do is reach out and hope.

## Chapter Notes

i think this is the longest one so far :0

The lush green forests of the Shroud were always a favorite stopover for Moriko on her many adventures. The tranquil calm that came with swaying oaks and dappled sunlight was always a much needed pick-me-up. However, her current visit through the woods was anything but recreational. The silence that typically brought comfort now only carried a tension. Her ears strained for anything out of the ordinary: snapped twigs, angry yelling, the usual sort of sounds associated with an angry mob out for blood.

Tataru's sudden yelp broke through the heavy silence. Moriko jumped before whirling around. The lalafell woman had tripped over an exposed root, only to have Alphinaud hastily help the woman to her feet. He whispered something, leading Tataru to shake her head and mumble a stuttered reply.

The elezen boy looked up to Moriko. Despite his bravest attempts, Moriko saw the apprehension, the fear in his eyes. She offered him her best smile, but was almost certain he saw through it.

"Is it safe?" Alphinaud said in a hushed voice.

Moriko's ears flicked. "I haven't heard anything in a while. We might be on a safe path, but I wouldn't get too comfortable," she replied.

This all felt like a nightmare - Nanamo poisoned, the coup in Ul'dah, and the Scions of the Seventh Dawn scattered to the winds, only gods knew where. Moriko ran her fingers through her dark orange hair, pushing her bangs back in the process. She took in a deep breath and promptly let it out.

"Coerthas shouldn't be far from here," Alphinaud chimed.

"Yes, but I'm worried about what will meet us between here and there," Moriko replied. She took her eyes off of the landscape before her to look back to her weary companions. "As

much as I would love to push forward, we need to find shelter and rest. Tataru could especially use the break.”

“I-I’m fine, Moriko! We can keep going,” Tataru spoke up. There was a smile on her face that didn’t quite reach her eyes.

“I admire your determination, but I think it’s best if we didn’t over exert ourselves. Please understand that neither of you have the endurance that I possess.” Moriko frowned.

Alphinaud placed a hand onto Tataru’s shoulder. “You’re right,” he started, “but where would even be safe? Even if we found a hovel to squirrel away in, I would assume you would want to stay up the night to keep watch and I don’t think that’s a wise idea either.”

“I’ve handled worse,” Moriko quickly replied with a quirk of her lips.

It was Alphinaud’s turn to frown. “I do not doubt you, but as you look out for us, we, too, must look out for you.”

Tataru nodded, her eyes already beginning to glisten with unshed tears.

Moriko sighed, knowing when she was beat. “Alright, alright. It was only a suggestion.” She looked up at her surroundings once more. “We’re in the North Shroud, correct? There should be a friendly Ixali tribe nearby.”

While mention of the avian beast folk would send a shiver up most people’s spines, Moriko’s friends stayed calm at their mention. “Friends of yours, I take it?” Alphinaud asked.

“Yes, actually. The Ehcatl Nine might be able to house us while we rest.”

“Any friends of yours, Moriko, are friends of ours!” Tataru replied softly.

It took a little longer than normal to make their way to the Ixali camp. Given that the main roads weren’t particularly safe for the trio, the long way was the only option. While escaping Ul’dah and the Thanalan area had been the hardest part, there was no telling how far the false accusations had spread. Nor were they privy to who was safe to interact with and who wasn’t.

“Most people will willingly stay away from any of the Spoken, regardless if they’re friendly or not. Even if our enemies thought to seek out the tribes for our whereabouts, they wouldn’t dare do so unless they wish to insight unnecessary battles. This will give us the time we need to collect ourselves,” Moriko explained as they pressed forward.

“While I don’t doubt your judgement, you’re *positive* they will host us for the time being?” Alphinaud asked. His concern was valid.

Moriko nodded. “If nothing else, I’m asking for a favor owed.”

They slipped out of the line of trees and onto a grassy trail that led deep into a mined out valley. The path was walled off by high walls of natural stone. The trio rounded the corner and came upon a makeshift pen that housed a pair of dark brown dire wolves being tended to

by a lone Ixali. Unlike the ones Alphinaud and Tataru were familiar with, this one had plumage that shimmered in a mixture of greens and blues with brilliant red horns sprouting from its head making the avian's overall appearance pop out against its muted surroundings.

The animals were the first to sense the trio's presence. They raised their heads, fur standing on end, before their dark eyes caught sight of Moriko. As she lead her companions closer to the pen, the wolves began to bark and rushed close to the edge of their enclosure. Their bodies shook with excitement as she reached out a hand and ran her fingers over their wiry fur.

"Hey guys," Moriko greeted. "It's been a while."

"Moriko, squawwk!"

Her ears flicked as she looked to the Ixali tending to the pen. For the first time in a while, a true smile graced her face.

"I apologize for the short notice. Is Sezul around? I must speak with him at once," Moriko asked.

The Ixal eagerly nodded. "In he is! Press forward you will and usual spot he is."

"Thank you, oh, and, I have friends with me. I hope that won't be a problem?"

"Problem it is not, squawwk!"

Moriko gave her thanks before ushering her friends closer to her. Ahead stood the tall, imposing wooden gate that lead them deep into the Ixali home. The miqo'te woman pushed her way in as if she lived there.

Alphinaud and Tataru were far too enraptured with their surroundings. All around them, Ixali with the same coloring as the first worked on various projects with the tools in their hand. Moriko waved to the chirping birds as they squawked her name out in greeting. She led the other two down a series of winding wooden staircases, all which wrapped around a large aircraft that sat tied to the ground. Three massive balloons were tied to the top of the craft, each imprinted with the Ehcattl Nine insignia.

"Sezul!" Moriko exclaimed as she approached a fairly large Ixali, arms wide open.

"Moriko!" the Ixal, Sezul, chirped. "Sudden visit this is! What brings ally to Ehcatly Nine, squawwk?"

She drew close to him and stood tall as Sezul tilted his head in blatant curiosity. "Moriko alright, she is?" he asked before she could say a thing.

Moriko looked down at herself. She hadn't had a chance to remove her dress clothes. They were dirtied and torn at the edges from the rough journey she had so far endured.

"I'm...as fine as I can be right now," she tentatively replied. "I have a favor to ask, if it's not too much."

“True ally of Ehcatl Nine have anything!” Sezul replied. “Ask not, she must, squawwk.”

“I seek sanctuary for my companions and I...there was an incident. Just a place to rest our heads for a little before moving forward.” Moriko fiddled with the hem of her shirt. Her tail twitched.

Sezul was quiet for a moment. “Help, Moriko needs?” he slowly asked. “Trouble caused for friend, squawwk?”

“I-It’s fine. Please, don’t worry yourselves.” She raised her hands in a disarming gesture.

“Rest you will have. Beds arranged, they shall.” Sezul nodded.

“Thank you, Sezul. We’ll stay out of your way and be gone before you know it.” Moriko turned her head and nodded to the other two.

The bedding provided was nothing more than simple straw beds. It’d be uncomfortable, but at least the trio had a place to sleep. As they were taken care of, Moriko pulled Sezul aside once more.

She procured several slips of paper and a writing utensil . Alphinaud, ever curious, had attempted to listen in on the exchange, but quickly found the two had dropped common Eorzean for language he didn’t understand in the slightest. The noises the two made sound akin to chirps and growls. He’d have to ask Moriko later, even if he had to face her ire at his eavesdropping.

“I have one more favor to ask of you, Sezul,” Moriko said in a hushed tone.

Sezul nodded. “Anything,” was his reply.

“I can’t explain to you the current situation. I don’t want to draw you into this mess, however,” Moriko paused as she finished scribbling out a letter. It wasn’t written in Eorzean, but instead, a common language shared between Spoken tribes. She’d written it in Beastspeak. “If it is at all possible, I need you to send these to the others. Novv, Hamujj Gah, the others. I don’t know what’s being spread, but I need them to know I’m okay and for them to not worry.”

She rolled up the parchments once the lettering had set. Sezul reached out and clasped her hands with his taloned ones. “Sezul complete Moriko’s wish, he will.”

Moriko smiled. “Thank you, friend.”

# Beginnings

## Chapter Summary

It all starts somewhere.

Kugane summer nights were typically on the warmer side, but the occasional breeze drifted through the trees to ease any mounting discomfort. Momoka Kimura padded down the hall of her small home. Tucked away in her arms were a few extra pillows. She came upon the door to her shared bedroom, already cracked several inches. With only her foot, the woman managed to widen the gap further, just enough to slide through with the bundle on hand.

Her young daughter was asleep in her crib; Momoka was grateful for the rare moment of peace. As she turned away from the door, she was quick to silence the surprised yelp. Hunkered down next to the sleeping child was a red and white, multi-tailed fox. In any other instance, Momoka would have laughed seeing such a dignified creature scrunched into a tiny space. Despite his current circumstances, the beast managed to fold his forelegs neatly in front of him as he peered down into the crib.

“Tamashii! Goodness, you startled me,” Momoka whispered as she retrieved her dropped pillows. “If you wanted to meet Moriko, you could have asked ahead.”

The fox flicked an ear towards the woman. He hummed, though it only came out as a low growl.

Momoka moved towards her shared bed and deposited two of the pillows onto her side. Even though he hadn’t asked, she placed the last spare on her husband’s side. “It’ll still be a while before she’s your charge.”

“I am aware,” Tamashii spoke proper. He had yet to remove his eyes from the baby girl.

“Are you that eager to move on?” Momoka asked upon standing.

He hummed again. “I had no intention of visiting, but I had to know the source of this unbearable light.”

Momoka tilted her head. Her long, white hair contrasted with her dark skin as it slipped down her shoulder from the movement. “What light? I’ve dimmed everything because of the baby.”

“I am ever reminded of how blind the race of men is in comparison,” Tamashii huffed. “Your child. She glows like the sun.”

Momoka moved towards the crib. She placed her hands upon the railing and peered down at her child. Moriko lay there, still asleep.

“Not physically...” Tamashii mumbled from her side.

Her white ears drew back. “Of course not.” She brushed back her hair. “What does it mean, Tamashii. Is it...an omen?”

The fox stood to his full height, well above the short, miko’te woman. “I cannot say, but rest assured, she is well protected.”

“You’re leaving already?” Momoka asked, turning her eyes on him.

“I have the answer I was looking for and my curiosity is sated. There is no other reason for me to stay.”

“Oh, well. Be safe then.”

Tamashii bowed his head. He stalked toward the open window and slipped out. Once the last tail disappeared, Momoka looked down toward her daughter again. She reached a hand out and gently rubbed one of Moriko’s tiny, dark orange ears.



# Part

## Chapter Summary

Like a flash, Estinien is there in an instance and gone in the next.

Aymeric de Borel was a man that had seen a lot of things in his, thus far, short lifespan. From unspeakable horrors to the downright otherworldly, there was naught left that could surprise the Lord Commander of Ishgard. And yet, when Estinien Wyrmblood burst through his doors carrying a blood and unconscious warrior of light, Aymeric found no words.

The menial paperwork laid abandoned as he pushed himself from his desk. “Estinien!” he finally said. He had a difficult time choosing what to focus on.

“Remind me to have a conversation with our *dear friend* about impractical battle armor,” Estinien grunted as he adjusted the woman in his arms. The ornate dragon wings that sprouted from her garb stabbed into his side and he found the damn things generally unpleasant in regards to dragging around an injured Warrior of Light.

“What happened?” Aymeric asked. He rounded his desk and drew closer to his old friend.

“I’ll tell you on the way. She needs to be tended to,” Estinien replied, hefting the woman.

“There’s a spare room you can place her. Come with me.”

He quietly led the other man out of his office and down the least busy path to avoid any unnecessary stops. Those that did take notice had the mind to keep their heads down and at least avoid asking questions. Aymeric came to a halt before a door and opened it, gesturing his friend inside. Estinien wasted no time depositing Moriko’s body onto the available bed, visibly relieved to have her out of his arms.

The once proud Azure Dragoon stood straight dusted off his armor and wiped away bits of blood. “The wound isn’t too deep, so I expect a swift recovery,” he said and turned on his heel. He nearly ran face first into Aymeric on his way out.

“You aren’t leaving so soon are you?” the Lord Commander asked in an accusatory tone. “Would you not at least keep her company? You’ve yet to explain what happened.”

“A bad encounter with the Garlean Prince. I pulled her from the jaws of death before he could finish the job.” Estinien brushed past Aymeric. “Tell her I saved her or do not, I care not either way.” And with that, the silver haired man walked out the door, leaving Aymeric in a stunned silence.

He looked to Moriko and was ready to make haste for a surgeon before, once more, he was stopped in his tracks.

Estinien abruptly entered the room again, Moriko's topaz carbuncle tucked under his arm. He drew close to the bed and dropped the small creature atop her chest before he turned and made his retreat for a second time without a word.

Truly, there was little that could surprise Aymeric de Borel at this stage in his life.

# Ache

## Chapter Summary

It's the little things that keep you going.

## Chapter Notes

my brain is completely fried at this point

A familiar pain twisted through Moriko's chest, pulsating from the same origin point it always had for years. She pressed her palm against the source in a futile effort to ease her discomfort. A soft hiss escaped her as her ears pinned themselves against her skull.

"Are you alright, Moriko?" Hauchefant asked from her side.

She winced looking up at the elezen man, though it was hardly from the pain alone. "I'm fine," she replied and offered him her best smile.

"We could go back. Was it the trial? Have you not fully recovered? I can--"

Moriko held up her free hand, cutting him off. "It's fine, Haurchefant, really. This is...an old pain. I'll manage." She lowered her arm and appeared embarrassed. "I'm afraid it doesn't care much for the cold."

The worried look on Haurchefant's face gave way to a relieved smile. "Are you certain?"

She nodded. "If it's too much, I'll let you know. I promise."

"I shall keep you to that then."

Acclimating to the eternal winter of the Coerthan landscape was turning out to be a bigger challenge than Moriko had first anticipated. The old magical scar seared into the flesh just below her chest apparently took poorly to the chilling temperatures. She'd dealt with the pain in short bursts but now Moriko couldn't go a day without it flaring. A talk with Alphinaud seemed very likely in the future.

For now, she was determined to enjoy her day. Haurchefant had graciously offered her the chance to step out of House Fortempts for a brisk walk, free of obligations. He had guided the miqu'te woman down to the Jeweled Crozier, more for window shopping than anything else.

Despite the discomfort, Moriko did her best to quit fidgeting in public less the nobles had one more thing to pick at with her. Her time in Ishgard thus far hadn't been the worst. If she ignored the circumstances for her current residency, and the whispering, and just about everything else.

"You appear very deep in thought. Any further and I may have to hold your arm to keep you from walking into things," Haurchefant quipped by her side.

The corners of Moriko's lips quirked upward. "Would that be such a shame?" she replied with a flick of her tail.

Haurchefant laughed. "I suppose not."

There was a short, amicable silence before Haurchefant actually offered his arm to her. The gesture caught Moriko off guard, but his sincere smile was enough to coax her into accepting.

"Keep this up, Ser Greystone, and people are bound to talk," Moriko said with a soft laugh.

"About? Can a man not escort his friend through an unfamiliar city?" he replied.

She looked away, wanting to hide her warming face from him. "I doubt others will see it the same way."

"Then I'm afraid that is their problem."

This was surely a disaster waiting to happen. Moriko was almost looking forward to it. Gods knew she had already cemented herself as a thorn in the side of the Holy See following the aftermath of the trial.

# Lucubration

## Chapter Summary

Overworking yourself is less appealing when you remember you have an angry sister ready to bare upon you and force you to rest whether you want to or not.

Most of the local residents of the Rising Stones had retired for the evening save for an ever studious, silver haired teen. He occupied one of the various round, wooden tables and sat hunched over a thick tome with several more stacked by his side. The warm candle light glinted off the silver clasp of his pointed ears. Every so often, the silence was punctuated by a page turn and the faint scribbings of pen on paper as the young elezen, Alphinaud, took down notes to accompany his reading.

His head had begun to droop, but Alphinaud was ever stubborn. He soldiered through the growing exhaustion. Just one more page, he'd repeat to himself like it was a personal mantra. The subject matter lay bare before him no longer mattered at this hour. The text had long since blurred together.

Alphinaud laid his writing utensil down and sat back with a long stretch. The Rising Stones was a different place after dark. It was unusual to hear stillness within the halls. If he strained himself, he could faintly make out hushed whispers of those not yet claimed by sleep.

He looked up upon hearing the main door open and shut with a soft click. Through the dim light, Alphinaud watched Moriko slip into the hall and stop in her tracks upon spotting him. Her ears were pointed upward in a surprising amount of alertness despite the given hour.

"What are you doing still awake?" she asked in a quiet tone.

"I could ask the same of you," Alphinaud replied. He rubbed his eyes.

He'd never admit it, but the way the light reflected off her eyes at night was always a little unnerving. To be shrouded in shadow only to have two glowing orbs staring one down was not the most welcomed sight, regardless of who the eyes belonged to. Moriko stepped closer to his seat.

"I was out on business if you must know," she said as she rested a hand on his shoulder.

"Come on. You need to rest."

Alphinaud slightly bristled. "I'll sleep when I need to, besides," he paused, gesturing the books before him, "I have quite a lot still to go through."

"Ohhh, I see," Moriko feigned understanding as she crossed her arms and leaned against the table's edge. "I suppose then that you'll be alright with me informing your sister of your

nightly studies.”

Alphinaud lowered his hand.

Moriko flicked her tail. “I’m sure she won’t have much to say on the matter.” She grinned.

“Fine, fine, you win!” Alphinaud laid his hands upon the table and pushed himself up from his seated position. “I’ll rest! I’m in no mood for a morning lecture from her!”

“I’m proud to see you making such reasonable decisions.”

Alphinaud glowered at her. “I’ll be less likely of a target if I inform her of your nightly adventures.”

“She’ll have no one to lecture if I conveniently leave once more.”

The boy scoffed before heading towards his room, feathers ruffled.

# Fade

## Chapter Summary

To say you have experience traversing to other realms truly is something else.

## Chapter Notes

technically not far behind but i have been lazy about posting these up hhhh. everything's really short because brain still hurty

*Technically* this wasn't the first time she'd been sent to another dimension. The near out-of-body experience of flying (or was it falling?) through space and time wasn't entirely unfamiliar to her. Moriko had once traversed to the Interdimensional Rift to face Omega in what was truly an otherworldly adventure. But that was then and this was now.

Around her was a never ending stretch of darkness punctuated by glittering, fragmented pieces of crystal. It was difficult to stay trained on any one for longer than a few seconds, but if Moriko squinted hard enough, she could just barely make out pictures trapped behind the clear surface. The journey wasn't a silent one. There were voices, so many voices echoing in the abyss. Most were difficult to understand, but occasionally she picked out one or two. She wished she hadn't.

*"A smile better suits a hero."*

These pieces of crystal weren't random. They'd held familiar faces and painful memories that gutted her heart and had Moriko scrambling to compose herself before her journey's end. It'd been so long since that awful day, but no stretch of time was long enough to entirely mend the wound left behind by Haurchefant's death.

Moriko suddenly felt herself being pulled toward a pinprick of light. She no longer had the time to dwell on what once was as the ground quickly drew up to meet her head on. The everlasting darkness opened and gave way to brilliant light that blinded her upon exit. With a hearty *thump*, Moriko hit the ground.

She lay there for a few moments before testing her limbs. Nothing felt broken, just sore with her head stuck in a mild daze. With a bit of effort, she forced her hands underneath her chest and pushed up into a seated position. Moriko had to blink a few times and shield her eyes so that she could probably adjust to the stark change of light. It really was blinding.

The foliage around her was like nothing she'd ever seen before. The grass, the trees, nearly every plant she could spot with her limited vision was a bright shade of purple or pink. Moriko staggered to her feet amidst the oddly colored forest and stood dumbfounded on where to go. She had no idea if this plane of existence operated on the same rules like her home or if it came with its own set of rules like the Interdimensional Rift had.

The violet grass bent under her foot as she took one step, then another. There was only one way to find out.



# Panglossian

## Chapter Summary

Don't try to stop a Warrior of Light who is on a mission.

Leaping across realms and nearly surrendering one's life on numerous occasions in such rapid succession had a way of altering perspective.

With her business on the First finished and little reason to go back aside from the occasional check up on young Ryne, Moriko was hellbent on keeping herself on the Source. There was lost ground that needed to be regained.

In a rare loss of character, Sidurgu's face brazenly displayed unabashed shock when Moriko stormed into The Forgotten Knight, marched down the stairs, and wrapped both arms round his back and drew the auri man close. He'd tensed from the action, arms frozen mid-air as he tried to make sense of what was happening. From the corner of his eye, he spotted Gibrillont ducking his head as the man suddenly found the glass he was cleaning the most interesting thing.

To say Sidurgu felt mortified was a mild understatement.

"Are you well, Moriko?" he asked through clenched teeth.

There was an old, familiar feeling of anxiety deep in his chest. The woman clinging to him only had the decency to nod with a soft hum.

"Please remove yourself. People are staring."

"Let them," Moriko finally replied. If anything, her grip drew tighter.

"What's gotten into you?" Sidurgu awkwardly laid his large hands atop her shoulders. He wasn't quite attempting to push her away, but he certainly wasn't returning the embrace.

Rielle giggled. It was a soft noise and she did her best to stifle it with her hand. The young elezen girl watched the two with mirthful eyes.

"I'm home for good. Please let me have this," Moriko admitted.

"I... *fine*," he huffed.

Moriko held him tight for a few seconds longer, but they honestly seemed to drag. It wasn't that he was adverse to her affections. From the very start of their tentative relationship,

Sidurgu had always feared deep down the repercussions that could follow if the greater populace was keen to how the two truly felt about one another.

He finally began to relax and semi-returned the gesture. “Are you sure you are well?” he asked once more.

As nice as it was to hear that her business had been concluded in the other world, the way she spoke of it led him to believe that seeking all the answers was not in his best interest. Moriko appeared weary from her journeys. Her sudden actions couldn’t be blamed entirely on lack of impulse control, he mused.

With a resigned sigh, Sidurgu allowed himself to relax into the hug. “You’ll talk when you’re ready?” he asked her, looking down at her drooping ears.

Moriko nodded into his armor. That couldn’t have been comfortable.

# Where the Heart is

## Chapter Summary

Confronted with her own mortality, she lays paralyzed in fear.

She'd never been confronted with the prospect of dying before. Of course, to anyone else, the Warrior of Light faced near death on a daily basis - facing down primals and fixing world ending crises. But through each and every trial, Moriko never felt like she was facing the end of her life. Not in her battle with King Thordan, nor her scraps with Zenos. This was different.

Her room within the Pendants had normally brought reprieve from the shock of being ripped from one world into another. The silence that had once given her comfort only suffocated her in unease. She lay on the made bed, staring wide eyed at the ceiling as her hand desperately clung to the front of her shirt.

Swirling within her body at that very moment was a mass of brilliant light ready to rupture forth. It almost had. She'd felt her body begin to split and leaks trickle from her mouth. At some point between then and now, Moriko had lost consciousness and the light had been kept at bay - possibly by Ryne's doing. Even if it weren't apparent, however, she could still feel the aether twisting within. Writhing, begging for release.

Moriko was hyper aware of her body and every little movement and sound it made. Her blood pounded in her ears and every second made it more difficult to draw breath.

She screwed her eyes shut. Tried to force the impending dread out of her head. Her aching heart yearned for the frigid cold winds of Ishgard. If only she could feel its chill then maybe it would breathe within her new strength.

How much longer would she hold out? Emet-Selch had hinted that if something wasn't done, the light would turn her. Moriko would become the very thing she had been working so hard to rid this world of.

Her chest grew tighter. *No, no, no*, she cried to herself. She tore through the panic and the pain, clawed for something, *anything* to ground her.

Through the mounting fear, Moriko re-discovered teal eyes and a scowling face of a horned man. She held fast to the picture, clung to it. The pain withdrew, if only marginally, but it was enough to steady her breath and relax her posture. Moisture beaded beneath her dark lashes.

Moriko curled up on her side and pressed her wet face against the pillow. She wished to be at The Forgotten Knight, comforted by an embrace of shadow.



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