

## Luminosity

She first felt a trickle of her other power, the beginning drips of an immense well within her, when she was six. She was clinging to a boulder in the middle of a rushing river, the sun shining on the crown of her head. Lux took gasping breaths as she tried to stop the current from tugging her away. The moss was making it hard to keep her grip; her small fingers scrabbled for purchase, tucking into the creases of the rock. The water was freezing. Numbness spread from the tips of her toes and inched slowly up her sides, coiling deep into her bones and mingling with the fear in her stomach.

“Garen! I can’t hold on any longer, I’m slipping!”

Water rushed into her mouth. She choked, hacking and grimacing to get the most of it out. Something stirred deep within her, a fleeting press of heat, a little whisper of calm. She pressed herself tighter against the rock and willed herself not to cry.

Her brother was on the opposite bank, heaving a trunk from a nearby fallen tree to act as a makeshift bridge. He was young still, the bulk of his muscles not yet honed from the years of training that he would soon undertake. Fear of losing his sister drove him forward. With a cry of frustration, he slung the trunk along, putting one foot in front of the other, his tunic soaked with sweat from terror and exertion. Even as her head dipped underwater as a particularly violent eddy pushed her below, Lux could still hear his grunts of pain.

And then her air cut out. Lux gagged. The water rushed up her nose and seared the back of her throat. Her arm scraped against something sharp and her feet, peddling desperately against the force of the river flow, dislodged sprays of smooth pebbles and silt. The edges of her vision began to go hazy and whenever she opened her eyes, the world was blurry and gray.

*Help me*, she thought, and perhaps she cried it too, because she felt more water fill her mouth. *I’m drowning*.

The power turns from a trickle to a roar. It pulses within her, like blood in her veins, filling every inch of her body. The water in front of her hisses and steams as beams of iridescent light split from her skin like an afterimage. For a second, she’s staring at a mirror of herself, a second Lux floating in front of her, eyes closed, mouth curled up into a gentle smile. And then a second wave of magic wracks her, the *other* power, foreign and unstoppable. The river revolts against her for a brief moment, and then relinquishes its hold to her newfound abilities. Lux feels the water cradle her, feels her head break the water’s surface...and then Garen is there, screaming something unintelligible and dragging her ashore.

He deposits her onto the grass, too scared to be gentle about it, tears drawing ragged lines down his cheeks. Lux presses her face into the grass and laughs, drawing lungfuls of air with a manic desperation that can only come from a close brush with death. Garen pats her shakily on the back and doesn’t tell her that the last of the turquoise streaks in her hair are slowly turning back into their natural blonde.

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Kneeling on the crest of a ruined hill, Elementalist Lux wills away the calm of the Water, the bite of the Ice. In front of her, the elemental titan is already working itself free from her restraints, a monstrous silhouette against the darkness of early dawn. With one heave, it shatters the creeping ice that she'd used to snare its ankles and shakes itself free of residual droplets from her torrential spell. It continues its advance. Relentless.

Water couldn't wash it away, and ice couldn't snare it. Elementalist Lux mutters a curse under her breath and limps onwards, towards the ruins of her old home.

It isn't a pretty sight. It only took one wave of fighting to destroy the royal army. The second wave of creatures had been to wreak havoc upon the land, to tear down the proud buildings and batter through the walls, sending citizens wailing through the streets with naught but their lives and fresh horrors in their minds. The elemental beasts had overwhelmed her home; the elderly mages too old to fight, the young ones too frightened, too inexperienced. Garen had long been sent away to fight in foreign lands, too far away to have even gotten word of their unfortunate plight. And their Queen, Lux herself...she had heeded the warnings too late, so obsessed with taming her elemental magic, honing her light and hunting the darker powers to corners of her consciousness, too fearful of her own abilities to truly use them.

Only smoke and embers left now. There is nothing left for her to harm, nothing left for her to protect. A tattered cloth, carried on the wind, flares with old elemental magic as it drapes itself across her arm. It lightens with her family crest and then wreaths itself in flame, scattering ashes to the wind. Something twists in her heart, hideous and bitter.

The grating of granite. Lux throws herself to the right, narrowly avoiding a fistful of debris and boulders that the giant had sent arching through the air, and *reaches*.

The power comes to her in a blinding roar, not the calm of water that she was used to but the fire and fury of a storm. The heat colors her hair a vivid crimson. Elementalist Lux, the most powerful of the mages, Queen of this ruined kingdom, throws back her head and screams her righteous rage.