

“Dad?” Theshan lifted his head to look inquisitively at his father.

“Yes Theshan?”

“Will you teach me? I want to be like you.”

“Of course my son.”

Varus leaned down to gather Theshan in his arms, who pulled away from him.

“Mom says I’m too old to be carried.”

Varus smiled, “nonsense.”

Soon Theshan was rocked to sleep. Varus leaned his cheek into his son’s hair listening to every heartbeat and breath while he watched the sunset.

A voice called out from behind, and he turned to look for his wife as the last light of the sun faded. A darkness came, unnaturally fast. He tightened his grip on Theshan, mind racing to his bow, where was it?

“Theshan, wake up,” his son didn’t respond to him.

“Theshan!” He shook him to no resistance. His body was still, his heartbeat silent.

“THESHAN!”

The sea turned crimson. The blighted waves crashed against the shore, dispersing into an intangible mass that leapt into the sky, eclipsing Varus and the body of his son. Varus shielded Theshan as the wave spiraled downwards, transforming into a jagged black spike that drove itself into Varus’s heart.

He did not scream when he woke, such dreams always ended the same, but for a time they were blessings.

Consciousness flooded in with the haze of dawn, as the last vestige of sleep ebbed away his senses were assaulted by Pallas. It writhed across him, tugging at his limbs, a sensation which intensified as he rose to his feet. Tendrils leapt and pulled in all directions. Varus collected himself, as he inhaled the corruption’s flailing subsided. It obediently reeled back towards his body; the sinuous mass returning to form around his limbs like a knot being tightened.

Varus had sought sleep the night before beneath a dead tree. The soil there had been devastated by chemical barrages within the first weeks of the invasion. Shortly after, Noxian forces had settled in an abandoned temple on the horizon, converting it to a fort from which to oversee the occupied people. Varus sneered and began walking, stepping around the body of a Noxian scout who’d discovered him in the night.

As he hugged the treeline, out of sight, four Noxian troops approached a nearby farmhouse, two children fled inside at their approach. Pallas rippled across his raised bow arm, eager to leap to life in his hands. As they drew closer a young girl stepped out to meet them. The patrol’s leader, a stout dark-skinned woman, slid a pack from her shoulders. She pulled

from it, a wedge of cheese, loaf of bread, and half-sausage offering them to the girl. Varus lowered his arm, but Pallas's anticipation became a plea. The bow began sliding out of his palm against his will, and he clasped his other hand against his arm attempting to stifle the creature.

It began to speak, the images flying through his head. He stood in the center of a river of Noxian blood. In his arms the blood converged, shaping and solidifying into a child he recognized as Theshan. Pallas spoke to him, voice distorted with memory and malice.

"Kill.... Heal..."

The river disappeared. Varus stood watching the sun, Theshan beside him, holding his hand and smiling. He was older now, by several years.

The images faded, Pallas had taken shape in his hands, ready to unleash itself upon the oblivious Noxian patrol. He lowered his arm, pulling the bow into his palm against Pallas's convulsing protests.

"No."

Pallas's voice came back tinged with something like desperation. "KILL..... HEAL!"

"This will not bring them back... I knew that already."

Again it spoke, voice strangely meek, "kill.... heal?"

"No. That's not how it works."

The voice came one final time, naive, childlike, "kill..."

"No Pallas..."

In Pallas's silence Varus felt its confusion. It raced through him, trying to find something it had missed, scouring his memories for understanding. Varus forced himself to remember teaching Theshan how to crawl, walk, and speak. To string his bow and hold it, and connect these things to his life. He remembered teaching Theshan not just how to *do*, but to *understand*.

This time he did not fight the pain that came with them, he forced himself to feel the sorrow now aware that Pallas felt it too, determined to give it something else to learn.