

1.6 Reprieve

The sky lit up in front of Kara. Walls of flames sprouting up, consuming flora and fauna alike.

THERE ARE LIKE THESE TORNADOS SPAWNING OFF THE PLASMA STORM!

Kara came back from the brink of consciousness as she saw the fire spread quickly near by. She pushed her legs harder as the fire spread around her. She pointed herself towards the village walls. She could feel a stinging sensation in her thighs as she found her way out of the chaotic combat zone.

The, palms, and the fields to the south... Gone.

Could be worse I suppose.

"HEY!" She shouted into the wind.

Kara's irritation grew into a grit of her teeth as she caught sight of a large inferno making its way in towards the mill.

I wanted...

Honestly, this is a bit sooner than I had anticipated, but this is Talik's offering for the contest. So chaos is expected.

They call it, "operation Fire Fist"

I don't know if I have ever met people more obsessed with fire.

Seriously

All of them.

Talik is an enabler too.

She is the biggest pyromaniac out of all of them.

I know first hand.

She set a tavern on fire because she, "Didn't want to pay the tab."

She said she was just doing a 'magic' trick. when the bar went up in flames.

You better believe she was back there the next day putting her Aetherial arts to use..

She was going to rebuild that poor families livelihood, and then some.

It took her a long time to earn back my trust after that one.

I forgive, but I don't forget.

oh.. oh.. Come on. The mill.. Now the mill is on fire.

Huh?

What's that?

Kara could hear the air crackle as a bright blue energy bolt streaked by overhead. It struck a wave of Skripi as they were being pushed back towards the river. "Hmmm..." Kara hummed.

would you look at that. A strange log jam of killer arachnids is forming. She must have stalled them out.

A blue shimmer spread from creature to creature as they rubbed against one another. It looks like a ripple of blue along a black canvas. Kara caught herself staring and thinking it was rather beautiful.

oh, Astrid... what did you do? oh..

She turned them into... Sheep.

Fluffy, flammable sheep.

No.. I can't watch.

Maybe, no..

This... is just... so gross. Very gross. An ever flowing tap of burning sheep. **The air began to smell kinda good, and she could feel her mouth water a little.**

Huh... Now the sheep are flying through the air.

"It is horrifying. So many dead sheep...

Astrid wins..." Kara whispered to herself.

Despite Kara's slight nausea, she felt a swell of hubris in what Astrid had done.

That was her... wasn't it?

Kara looked down towards the soldiers claiming their feast; she didn't feel too particularly hungry, but she did find a sense of joy, and peace, watching the soldiers pull the Skripsi sheep, limb, from limb as the fire died down enough for the soldiers to rush in.

Kara could tell her attention had waned as she felt a massive object drag against the mythril lining of her skirt until it found an exposed area of thigh.

And that, is called letting your guard down...

Kara could feel the spear tipped tail rip straight through the side of her thigh. Kara grit her teeth, falling to one knee, The tenacity! A half torn torso, one half pulling the stringy bits of the other.

Instinct kicked in, and she simultaneously severed the creature's tail, and she quickly attempted to slow the flow of blood spilling down her leg with her free hand. She could feel her breathing shallowing.

A lifeless thump of the tail hitting the ground was followed by the clang of her sword against the red, smooth, stone beneath her. She looked up from the red stone path leading towards the walls, and the encampment, but found herself falling to her knees, scraping them against the stone. She pressed hard into her thigh. Taking a deep breath.

A blue glow sprung up around her hand as she moved it along her thigh. The glow migrated around her hand from both sides. Forming a translucent blue halo about her leg. The air crackled, and sizzled as the wound began to close.

Unfortunately... whoa... Kara drew in a deep breath, gritting her teeth. The leftover barb is digging itself into my leg! The blue halo flickered for a moment as she lost her concentration, sending a shockwave of pain along her side.

Focus.

Kàra felt herself tense up, and she couldn't shake the feeling that something was staring her in the face. She brought herself up to a knee, still tending to her wound. She drew in a deep breath and found herself blindly staring into the chaos still around her, it feels like time is simply dripping by the hourglass. I..

Think the venom is seeping in...

Ever since we landed we have bounced from border village to border village. They marched us down their border. Never pushing too close, but always drawing us out clearly where their next target would be.

Whoa, I feel like my brain is on fire.

Do they serve a master? What kind of power could control these creatures?

Kara bit her lip, and began chewing on it. She mulled it over and over as she looked down at her leg, almost... and done. The blue glow dissipated and her leg looked, good.

Kara stood and felt a squish in her boot as her heel reseated itself, and a sharp pain reminding her of the venomous tip in her leg. Her vision went blurry, and she blinked hard getting disoriented for a moment. She shook her head lightly sending her disheveled hair flinging back and forth before she picked up her slender sword from the ground.

Kara heard a cheer rising up and she turned to look off towards the river. She could see the remnants of the horde fading into the distance.

Are you there?

I AM NOW.

I'm not sure where I go wrong with the way I communicate.

HOW DO YOU MEAN? YOU SEEM FAIRLY STRAIGHTFORWARD.

Kara sheathed her sword and began to walk back towards the encampment and the village after finding a route to the red rock path. She winced a few times as she took those first steps and continued on with a subtle hitch in her gait.

I try, but I think I process a lot of things out loud... or as you can see through our conversations in my head. It is like I need to shuffle

through tremendous amounts of information to draw down to conclusions that seem so simple to many people, but just seem so complex to me. Was that way throughout school too. Someone might be able to remember something and accept it, but I had to recreate the wheel so to speak.

I GUESS I AM NOT QUITE SURE I FOLLOW. BUT MAYBE THAT IS THE POINT YOU ARE MAKING.

Yeah... So for example I've been thinking a lot about how do you appropriately respect someone else's time? That is to say you and I are connected, but how do we not overload the other person by processing every thought in your head through this other person?

I can only imagine how exhausting it could get constantly try to process another person's perspective. They are constantly having to process new information that comes in that, while you find it interesting maybe they don't. Maybe it is overwhelming to them, but you don't know how to turn it off. You have been so deprived of genuine connection that when it presents itself...

YOU JUST BECOME BLINDED BY THE OVERWHELMING FEELINGS THAT YOU ARE PROCESSING...

Yeah, you dive in without respecting someone's limited time. What makes it worse if there are children involved. That person can't possibly contend with all of it at once. Constantly being bombarded by someone outside with whom you just met.

I CAN SEE HOW THAT MOST CERTAINLY THAT WOULD GET FRUSTRATING FOR THE OTHER PERSON.

Especially if even more stressors come up during that time. A whirlwind of chaos that you can't seem to halt.

I THINK I CAN SEE YOUR DILEMMA. IS THIS A RECENT OCCURRENCE?

I'm not sure. I get these vague visions when I am sleeping. I wake up in a cold sweat, my heart racing, and a feeling of dread just washing over me.

of love, of loss, of regret.

I guess I just wish other people could help me understand their feelings as clearly as I need.

THAT SOUNDS A TAD SELFISH.

Is it though? You tell me clearly give me some space, back off a bit. This in itself is a message of slow things down, but how much? Unless the other person adds extra information they are making you just take a guess as to what the other person wants. I mean sure if you can remember to ask for clarification great. But what about when the other person is already upset and they really don't want to interact with you at the moment, and asking for clarification would only upset them further?

SO, SOMETHING LIKE: THIS IS TOO MUCH FOR ME AT THE MOMENT. BUT I STILL LOVE AND CARE ABOUT YOU, I JUST NEED TO TAKE CARE OF MY BUSINESS, PLEASE GIVE ME A FEW DAYS OF SOLITUDE TO PROCESS.

Exactly, I mean even when I was processing that I thought about the possible ways to confuse the message of just needing space. Why is this so difficult for me?

A burst of static energy cut through Kara's mind. Forcing her to stop in her tracks.

...because you think too much. A static laced voice echoed through Kara's head.

What did you say?

I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING.

Yeah you did, you said I think too much, but it was all garbled and full of static.

NOPE NOT ME.

Hmmm...

HAVE YOU EVER FELT A LOVE SO POWERFUL IT JUST SIMPLY TOOK YOU BY SURPRISE?

Yeah maybe once - it burned so hot that it blew itself apart.

HMM... I REALLY HOPE THAT ISN'T THE CASE.

I JUST FEEL THE INTENSITY OF THIS. LIKE SHE HAS ALL THE KEYS TO MY HEART AND WAS WELCOMED RIGHT IN AS IF IT WERE NATURAL. IT FEELS LIKE HOME.

Sounds powerful. Sounds like, and forgive me if I am being rude, but it sounds like you wanted her to.

NO, I DON'T THINK YOU ARE WRONG ABOUT THAT. I REALIZED TOO LATE TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT.

MAYBE I WAS PROCESSING SO MANY FEELINGS AT ONCE I OVERWHELMED MYSELF, AND HER EVEN MORE SO THAN SHE ALREADY WAS. I AM NOT SURE.

It sounds like you have a fairly good idea. So, was this a recent encounter?

YEAH, BACK IN THE CAPITAL, FJALLHAMMAR. IT WAS A CHANCE MEETING, AND WE JUST SEEMED TO... OUR ENERGY WAS JUST INFECTIOUS.

IT WAS THE FIRST TIME SINCE MY WIFE LEFT ME THAT I HAD TRULY FELT SOMETHING.

I feel like there is a bit to unpack there.

SHE HAD AN ESTABLISHED LIFE, THAT HAD BEEN UPENDED, AND MY WHIRLWIND OF A LIFE CAME INTO HER LIFE. I PROCEEDED FROM A PLACE OF ARROGANCE, AND SELFISHNESS. I WAS ON THIS JOURNEY, AND I WAS MARCHING TO THE BEAT OF MY OWN DRUM. WHY COULDN'T SHE JUST DROP WHAT SHE WAS DOING AND PROCESS THESE INTENSE FEELINGS WE HAD FOR EACH OTHER?

In hindsight if you had not expressed such deep feelings for each other, and you might have kept more of a casual relationship in the beginning, and it could have worked out.

BUT AT THE SAME TIME - WHAT WAS AWESOME ABOUT IT WAS THE INTENSITY OF THE FEELINGS.

True. Those are the feelings that remind us that we are alive. The feelings that have an equal opportunity to gut you completely when you see them soaring without you. Living a path that doesn't include you, but it only guts you because you once walked that path together. At least something to be grateful for.

EXACTLY, I DO NOT REGRET FEELING WHAT I FELT, BUT PERHAPS IN THE FUTURE I COULD LEARN HOW TO CONTROL MYSELF BETTER SHOULD I MEET SOMEONE ELSE I SHARE A CONNECTION WITH...

What... I... um, have a hard time figuring out is the eggshells.

HOW DO YOU MEAN?

oh... um ya know... Making sure you do your best at something. So... I don't know you just want to make sure your partner is happy. Like you don't want to half ass something so you don't get yelled at or something like that.

I THINK I CAN UNDERSTAND THAT. I USED TO BE WITH SOMEONE WHO WOULD BERATE ME...

umm... No no... I don't mean like... Let's forget it. I am sorry. My thoughts are a bit of a jumble.

NO, NOT AT ALL, ARE YOU SURE?

Yeah I am not sure I chose the right words anyways. Eggshells? I mean I get yelled at, but I know I deserve it. I forget this or that, I am late, I don't communicate too well. You know the normal things, ha ha, this is the kind of thing she tells me about. This is why people have a hard time actually liking you - "You are always saying the wrong thing or you are too blunt. This is why people don't like you, you are a poor communicator..." You know the stuff I know I need to work on.

I... UH...

You know what I find so fascinating about these creatures? They leave so many eggs behind. It is always so fun spoiling them.

Are you serious Kara? You really think that is okay?

Who...

Nevermind who. What I am trying to understand how you think it is okay to be belittled. You are supposedly the commander of this elite military unit and you are rattled by your partner?

I uh...

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

Oh, the tool is here too. How interesting.

How long have you been here?

Long enough to know there is a serious disconnect between the warrior and the lover.

Kara focused on the ground, and then put her fingers to her temple, and with a green glow she muttered, "Did that do it?"

No. You can't seem to get rid of me like you can get rid of him.

Tros.

I mean while we have this girl time, let's get to know each other a bit. You seem repressed girly. A tad uptight even. Seems your lady friend has you wound up so tight your looking over your shoulder ever moment you can.

Shut up! You don't know anything about Astrid. You don't know who she really is. You can't see her inner beauty.

So tell me then. When was the last time you were able to tell her your deepest secrets, your deepest desires?

What is that even supposed to mean? That kind of stuff takes time. People have to be ready you can't just force things.

Kind of like when she wanted to have sex, but you weren't feeling it?

How do you even know about that? I just did what a good partner would do.

Unlike your masculine friend, I am not so dense. I can see this... Connection in my minds eye. It is like walking through the most baffeling dungeon. Your mind really lives in this dark place?

I am not sure how much I like the idea of you poking around in my thoughts.

Kind of like how she didn't like it when you told her no, so she got mad at you? Go ahead, get mad at me. Show me the door.

Kara grit her teeth momentarily and pressed her palms to the sides of her head and a light blue hue peaked out from the sides of her hands.

Honey, you are going to have to do better than that. I have been studying the AETHERIAL longer than you have been alive.

Kara noticed a crop of eggs along her path, and despite the unpleasantries, Kara did enjoy destroying eggs. She planted her foot into the side of one of the pulsating masses of mucus sending its gooey contents splattering about.

What do you want from me?

For you to be honest with yourself, and if you need to kick more of those egg things, so be it, but I won't leave you alone until you are at least a tad bit honest with yourself.

Then you will leave me alone? Wait can you see what I see too?

Minds eye sweetheart. I promise to leave you alone, for a while...

What do you want to know?

When you told her no. Why didn't you enforce it?

What do you mean? I wasn't feeling it that night. I don't always feel like having sex with someone.

Yeah, but that isn't what I mean. You told her no. But then you ended up having sex anyway.

So which is it? Did you want to have sex or not?

Well not really, I mean I made sure that she was taken care of, and it was kind of typical that I had a harder time releasing, but I was just happy that she was happy.

That is what a partner is supposed to do.

Is it? You said no, what three for four times, before what. What changed your mind?

Well, I guess if I were to be honest she started getting upset, and I started feeling bad. I didn't want to make her upset like that I am supposed to be her partner, and sometimes compromise just makes sense, ya know?

Oh. So what you are telling me is you are so concerned whether or not she would be mad at you that you just put yourself second. You were so afraid that she might, what, leave you? Because you didn't want to have put out? Sounds kind of fucked up to me.

Well... "Get out of my head!" Kara screamed outloud.

I am just saying girly, maybe the garden you are growing has a few more weeds than you think.

"GET OUT! GET OUT!! GET OUT!!!!" Kara screamed even louder as she looked straight ahead towards the village, tears welling along her eyes.

... I love her. Her needs matter. I am not always sure what will make her happy, but I want to step out of my own way if I can. That doesn't make me afraid. It is just putting someone else's needs before your own.

How many times has she made you feel like she would leave you if you didn't do what she wanted?

GET THE FUCK OUT!

Okay girly. But you know this isn't over. I will be back. I have a long journey ahead of me, and seriously the company I am keeping... Well, let's just say you are far more interesting.

Kara wound up and struck an egg with the side of her foot sending it hurtling into the air. She pulled right arm back, bringing her left hand in front of her right pulling in AEtherial energy that manifested in a red glow.

"Fuck these things." Kara sneered as she thrust both hands outward sending a glowing energy ball into the sky, striking the egg midair. A burst of goo and energy flashed outward in a circular disk.

At least this part can be fun. If you hit them right they crack like a giant condor egg; smells kind of like 'em too...

Kara kicked another, cracking it.

Astrid tossed one at me, once... Well...

Kara tilted her head to the sky and screamed, a tear falling from her wide eyes. Her arms raised above her head, fists clenched she stomped her right foot into the ground leaving a deep impression as a blast of golden fire raced from her body outward into the desert sands as well as the egg patches nearby. The aftermath left the sands slightly more reflective, and the eggs were vaporized completely.

Okay, so maybe that's how I wanted to react when I was covered with partially cooked condor egg.

At least wasn't boiling.. So there was that. Oh, and I guess.. You wouldn't believe what condor egg will do for the hair and skin. But..

See, I knew you had it in you girly.

GET. THE. FUCK. OUT. OF. MY. HEAD!

Kara slammed her hands against her head, sending a shockwave of energy outward from her head, collapsing to the ground.