

Chapter 1

The Forest

The year was 361. Celestyn Thornis ran through the woods, fleeing his town.

He reflected on his father's growing sickness, the same one plaguing the rest of his kind, the Vistakin - and his father's failing farm. The scent of rotting cabbage still filled his nostrils, his eyes tearing up slightly. He ducked under a branch, the red leaves brushing his face - but suddenly his head wrenched backward, sending a pang of sharp stabbing pain through his neck. He paused a heartbeat before looking up and spotted that his antlers were tangled in a low-sitting vine. With a low hiss he reached up to uncurl the vines.

With a tug his head jerked forward, a vine laying lazily against the back of his head. With a slight sigh of relief, he continued onward, into the red-leaved forest.

Continuing his reflection, he wondered where exactly his Lord, Visuisa was. *It's been a few weeks since his trip*, Celestyn thought. *Maybe I'll visit his Shrine-house.*

Celestyn paused, paws nestled in the soft purple grass. *I could probably climb up that tree.* Looking up the dark crimson trunk of a tree, he thought, *if I got above the canopy, I could spot the red roof tiles.*

He grabbed a sturdy low-hanging branch and heaved himself upward. As he climbed the rough tree, his palms grew redder by the second. With a slight relief, he sat on the highest branch, just below the canopy, and wiped his hands on his dirty trousers, ignoring the pulsating pain.

Leaves rustled around his face, before his head broke out overtop of the canopy. Blinking as the sun seared his several eyes, he paused a heartbeat to let his eyes adjust.

After only a moment, his gaze caught on the bright red tiling in the distance, shimmering like fire against the dim red leaves of the forest. *I'm close.*

With a slow inhale, the sharp cold air singed his lungs lightly, burning like gaseous ice, softening his grip as he enjoyed the cold breath flowing through his lungs. But the sudden slipping sensation snapped him back to reality. He gasped as the slick branch slipped out from under him, and he reached up – too slow. *FUCK!* He thought, reaching desperately for a branch. His hands burnt red.

Crack!

Silence.

Pain surged through his skull.
He tasted blood on his tongue.

Vertigo churned in his stomach as he sat up, rubbing his head. Hesitantly he looked at his hand, but was relieved to find it dry.

Remembering the technique his father taught him to relieve headaches, he closed his eyes. “One... Two...”, the blood pounded against his skull like a hammer. “Three... Four...”, the blood began to cool. “Five... Six...”, the pounding reduced to a gentle throb. “Seven...”, peace. “Eight...”, serenity. “Nine...”, focusing on the sounds of the forest surrounding him. “Ten.”

He sighed, testing his left leg, then the right. Relieved again, he stood. Noticing his bag on the ground, he bent down, gripped it in his hand. He heaved it up onto a low, sturdy branch.

Opening it, he searched. *12 gold. 19 silver. Good.* He placed the currency aside. He pulled out a reddish gem his father gave him. He took only a moment to linger on it, before he set it aside.

He pulled out a wrapped object, and slowly uncovered it – his late mother’s hand mirror. The only thing he has left of her. Relief surged through him at finding it intact – staring into his own five eyes, and his purple fur, his antlers stood tall above his head.

Quickly, he put his belongings back into his bag, swung it over his back, then continued his journey toward the shrine.

End of Chapter 1.