

The Bladed Kiss
A Light Strikers Novelette

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*Disillusioned by reality's imperfections,
she ran towards horizons of reflections,
afraid to succumb to the umbrage of surrender,
for the world could never attain such splendor,
nor beauty, for it would all just fall,
if it were filled with numbed down thralls.*

*Was it all an ephemeral wish,
washed away with shooting stars,
waded with temporal charms,
never chanced to flourish far?*

1

Colorful pastel clouds of all hues drifted in the skies above the mystical forest known as Choochahna. Several small peculiarly shaped sky puffs floated behind in a trail. These little critters were the elemental creatures that lived in the clouds. They often kept their eyes and limbs hidden since they were terribly shy. Close by, a pair of young dragons freely tumbled around through the skies. One was blueish-purple, and the other was reddish-green. They playfully chased after each other. Amidst their crackling elemental breaths, they also snapped at each other and looked like two school children at play. Soon, their gargantuan parents descended towards them and nudged the two younger dragons back up higher into the atmosphere.

Down below, Vanblairz was oblivious to the whole matter. Shirtless under the warm gleaming trisuns, he hung upside-down from a long, wraggly, zig-zagged branch that protruded from a scalakta tree. He was comfortably surrounded by a bunch of sparkly bubble-filled jewels that grew plentifully from these trees. For someone who recently turned thirty-five years old, he never lost any of his youthful vigors and positive personality traits. Yet anyone could tell that he possessed wisdom born from many years of life experiences as well as past mistakes.

His folded legs carelessly dangled, and he had the latest Altasharon kingdom fashion magazine flipped wide open within his hands. Without breaking a sweat, he was doing sit-ups while browsing his mag, both regular and reversed. His forehead would touch his knees, and then he'd swing in reverse until the back of his head touched the soles of his feet. Trick Scouts used their Spiritus training to transform their bodies into an ultra-flexible rubber-like state, with their Spiritus

powers of *remstraria*. Therefore, it looked as if Vanblairz had no spine while he did his upside-down sit-ups. Below his toned pale upper body and torso, he wore loose, red-striped purple pants that were stretchy and cushy, with boots that were wrapped with thick brown noojyla animal hide.

The scalakta tree that he hung from was at least fifty-five feet in height, and its smooth ivory trunk was well-weathered with marks from all kinds of insects and animals. As a matter of fact, four baby sweetie-cream birds were perched on Vanblairz's knees, and they whistled a catchy tune. All four of them were three inches in height, two inches wide. Their short ruffled feathers blended together in a gradient of neon green into dark blue with ivory speckles.

Each one also had a large pointy feather almost as tall as themselves, that popped up from their foreheads. Their whistling was catchy and pleasant, and true to their names. A creamy dribble of saliva dripped down from the corners of their itty-bitty beaks as they sang. The happier that sweetie-cream birds became, the more they dribbled, and they blew tiny bubbles from their cute beaks. Their dribble was actually a delicious sweet cream that made them tasty to many a predator. Since they were rare, killing them was against the code of the Altasharon kingdom. And a license was required to keep them as pets.

Vanblairz counted aloud, "Ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one-hundred! Ok guys, watch out!"

Then he quickly flipped up onto the thick, sturdy branch, and landed in a relaxed, laid-back position. Yet he never took his eyes off his fashion magazine. The sweetie-cream birds all fluttered back down, but this time, instead of landing on his knees, they all gently descended onto Vanblairz's wide-brimmed black hat that always stayed fastened on top of his shaved head. The hat was of the finest bespoke quality and had a single large shiny metallic feather that stuck out of its left side. Perhaps that's why these sweetie-cream birds liked him so much.

Deeper still, into the Choochana forest, a large viney plant had erupted from the ground covered among some pale green and yellow gumble bushes. Part of its vines climbed up a nearby scalakta tree and at the very end of it, a telescopic crystal lens peeked out. It was focused on Vanblairz.

And now that he was sitting upright, with his legs fully extended, it was much easier to get a full glimpse of the man. Vanblairz was the kind of stylish, handsome fellow a mother wanted her daughter to

marry. He stood six feet tall with mixed ethnic features, and he had a strikingly unique look.

Finally finished with his fashion magazine, he decided to hum along with the sweetie-cream birds. As he petted them, they gleefully tucked their heads underneath his hand and welcomed his gentle touch. A few minutes later, the four of them took an interest in his shirt that was hanging nearby. They playfully took turns tugging at it. With a smile, Vanblairz snatched it and put it on. The sweetie-cream birds made expressions that signaled how they were somewhat envious of his fancy shirt, with its floral designs and printed poetry text.

“Ahhh. I see. You little chicks wish you could wear a shirt like old man Vanblairz, huh?”

The sweetie-cream birds nodded in unison.

“Hmmm, then I shall remedy your woes.”

The sweetie-cream birds looked back and forth at each other in excitement.

Back yonder, the vine with the crystal telescope had receded itself, but now something baleful had formed underneath where the vines were, and cracked the earth. An imprint of a humanoid figure quickly appeared, and then melded back into the flat ground. A new vine sprouted and headed towards Vanblairz.

Vanblairz reached over and grabbed his nearby backpack, that was hung on another smaller nearby branch. It was beside his trick blades, which hung by their conjoined bow wire. After he dug around his bag, he pulled out a long piece of soft gray fabric and a small pouch filled with various tools and knick-knacks. After rummaging through it, he took out a pair of scissors. He stretched out the fabric and measured it against the four sweetie-cream birds. They all eagerly lined up and smiled. Vanblairz cut off a large piece of the fabric and folded it multiple times. After a few snips from his scissors, he unfolded four small tiny shirts, adjoined by their sleeves, and then quickly cut them apart. One by one, he placed a shirt on each of the sweetie-cream birds. The youngest sweetie-cream bird nudged aside the others to get its shirt on first. The shirts fit snugly and comfortably. The sweetie-cream birds were ecstatic.

“Well, I’m glad you’re all satisfied. It’s the least I can do to repay your warm company and lovely singing.”

Soon after, the parents of the sweetie-cream birds arrived. The parents had some green glabyool worms in their mouths, signaling it was time to get back to their nest for mealtime. Vanblairz smiled and

waved at the family of sweetie-cream birds, as they flew away.

A melodic chime started to play, and caused Vanblairz to reach into his pocket, from which he pulled out a small card. It was about a quarter-inch thick with the Light Strikers crystal sword and divine flower glass emblem built into it. The emblem lit up, and mystically projected a three-dimensional holographic portrait of a woman who appeared to be about twenty-nine years old. She had a stand-out appearance, in an attractive way. Her features all stood out against her tanned complexion, and her jet black hair was pulled back neat and tight into a long curved ponytail. The top of her hair was stylishly swooped into a twisty pompadour. White streaks and stripes were prominent in her hair, and on her ears were sparkly tramshara gem earrings.

Vanblairz smiled, "Hey Pajloo! It's nice to hear from you so early in the day. You look shining as always."

In the distance, the vine continued to grow as it weaved its way along the ground, blending in with the colors and textures of the earth, plants, and trees it touched. It quickly neared Vanblairz.

Pajloo smirked, "Thanks Van. And your chipper vibe is ever the welcoming gift. But allow me to apologize, as this will probably bum you out a little bit."

Vanblairz's left eyebrow tilted up.

Pajloo continued, "Look, I'm sorry, but I have to leave a day earlier to head back to my hometown."

Vanblairz quickly sat up like he was yanked by a rope. "What? As in you're leaving today? But what about your little going away party tomorrow morning?"

The vine stopped about thirty feet from Vanblairz, and slowly coiled upward, beside a scalakta tree.

"Yeah, I know. I was looking forward to it too. And I had some small gifts to give to you, and the rest of our cadre. But I'll have to leave them at the academy for you all to pick up after I leave."

"Wait- I'll just grab my things and call the others--"

Pajloo interrupted, "That's kind, however, I just finished a call with my parents, and I urgently need to leave now. I'm sorry I won't be able to see you, Rezeeya, and Dalahfey." She tried to gladden up. "But hey, well, at least I'll only be gone for about a month." She brought her fist up to her cheek. "And I'm sure it'll fly by like the speed of my punches!"

The vine had stopped moving, and a huge flower bud instantly

blossomed and opened up from the tip of the vine, revealing a lean adult Elven male. He was roughly fifty Elven years old, which translated to a human in their late-twenties. It took only a second for him to naturally step out of the vine and situate himself, hidden from Vanblairz beside a scalakta tree. The Elf was about seven and a half feet tall, lanky, but imposing. Like all Adamah Elves, he had long ears that stuck straight up, and then midway, bent backward at a swooping angle. His hair was shaved on the sides of his head, but the hair on top of his head was thick, and colored a gradient dark blue to white. It was brushed backward and upwards, with several inches of the ends spiked downwards. His eyes were narrow and clear white, but after he peered inquisitively at Vanblairz, he slowly blinked, and his eyes enlarged and changed into what looked like two orbs of crystalized ocean water.

"I understand. Please, give my love and regards to your parents." Vanblairz smiled.

"I shall, thanks Van. And before I go, one more thing- how is your undercover operation unfolding?"

"So far so good. Tomorrow night is when I'll meet the criminal buyer in Yulexiaf."

"And you believe he's connected to the *deadclad brethren*?"

"I do."

"Draggit, I wish I could be there."

"Don't worry. I have it under control."

"Then I look forward to our cadre going on missions and adventures together again soon."

"Same. We'll all miss you 'til then. Godspeed." Vanblairz ended the call and placed his Light Striker card back into his pants pocket. Then, he perked up with a suspicious expression on his face.

The nearby hidden Elf reached out to the scalakta tree beside him, mystically peeled away a layer of the trunk, and morphed it into a long organic spiral spear. He harpooned it right at Vanblairz. Vanblairz narrowly evaded it, flipped downward off the tree, and landed on his feet, both of his trick blades drawn, ready for combat.

The Elf stepped out to be seen. His attire shone splendidly; he had on a tight jacket formed from hard insect shells that looked dark purple and pale green depending on the angle, full of random colorful insect patterns. His pants were woven from various dark animal furs with skeletal lining. The trisuns casted a faint reflection upon his hazel brown skin.

The Elf remarked, "An impressive sense of awareness you have. I'm relieved, otherwise it would've been a tragedy."

"It's never easy getting the drop on a Light Striker. Especially a Trick Scout," retorted Vanblairz. "You came close, Elf. Now, what reason do you have for this foolish attack?"

The Elf reached over to a nearby splynura flower, and as he opened his palm, the flower supernaturally grew and stretched into his hand as he plucked it. Like an animated painting being fast-forwarded, the splynura flower metamorphosed into a sword, shaped like a thin cutlass, entwined with roots, stems, and petals.

"Hostile actions between humans and Elves are against the alliance contract," Vanblairz declared.

"I understand. Which is why this is a friendly duel. One that will allow us to sharpen our skills and techniques, if you will. I've always found myself fascinated by what I hear about human Light Strikers. Specifically, how they perform in combat. So let's have some fun. Blade to blade."

"That's nice and all, but surely, how am I supposed to just trust you, Elf?"

The Elf's eyes blazed with surging intensity. "My moniker is Drasamer. A *Sejador* to the *Thesleyan Vel'spire*. I assure you, this is a friendly contest. I vow on my spirit." He ducked down on one knee, closed his eyes, tilted his head forward, and placed his weapon down. Drasamer remained there for nearly a minute. After standing back up with his weapon, he nodded. Vanblairz watched, curiously.

"Very well, Drasamer. I'll give you the benefit of the doubt, my friend. And my name is Vanblairz. A Trick Scout belonging to the cadre called, *the upholders*."

The Elf smirked, "The upholders? Sounds comical, but I like it. Has a catchy sound to it."

"Well, sorry to disappoint you, but we're not currently taking new members. Now, shall we begin?"

"I'd be honored, good sir."

"'Tis a pleasure to make your acquaintance." Vanblairz elegantly bowed, one hand behind his back, the other upon his stomach. "I like your attire, by the way. Quite fancy. Very Elvish."

The two men pointed their weapons at one another and stared intently, finalizing a pact of honor made between them.

2

Not too far away, in a hidden refuge of rebels, a man in his fifties stood before a gathering of roughly thirty people within their commune. The man had a somewhat welcoming first impression, but not without an odd demeanor. He seemed to care not for his aged, chiseled features which were hard to make out against his dark skin. He had curly hair, an uncut beard, and heavily wrinkled robes. The stage he stood on was small and falling apart, while the rest of the rebels sat in small chairs. His name was Napalev and he was the leader of this particular set of rebels.

Napalev spoke with a deep and energetic tone, "And you have all been doing a great job with this season's harvest. We've grown more fruits and vegetables than we needed, and we'll have plenty of food we can store for the coming season."

Everyone in the commune congratulated each other with light cheers, smiles, and encouragement.

Napalev continued, "And we must show extra appreciation to our dear Kyoola. It was she who was responsible for taking into account all of our needs, planning the details, and organizing everything. And she also secretly acquired extra provisions for our food supply from the nearby towns." He motioned to the young woman sitting beside him, who looked to be about twenty-seven years old, to approach the stage. Everyone applauded as she stood up and walked to the center of the small stage. Embarrassed, she politely smiled and bowed.

Kyoola was plain, yet pretty. Her hair was a dark maroon, straight and parted down the middle, nothing fancy. She wore basic tan robes, and her eyes were a dark shade of green, large and round.

Napalev held up his hand, and caused everyone to quiet down,

“She also has an important request to make. So please, listen carefully.”

Kyoola cleared her throat, “Hi... Hello everyone. I’m happy that we all worked together, and our food supply this year has doubled that of the previous year. I promised we would not be hungry again, and because we all worked together, that has come true. Now I ask for your help once more. But this time, for a personal matter. In my hometown of Yulexiaf, I have always wanted to do away with the Altasharon monuments. They serve as reminders to the founders of the town, who are celebrated for their achievements. But that should not be the case. So I humbly request, and I kindly ask, for a few volunteers to join me. Three nights from now, I plan to sneak into Yulexiaf, and destroy the monuments. I’d like to have this done before a small celebration that will be held therein, six days from now. If any of you would be willing to accompany and help me, I’d be forever in your debt.”

The adult members of the rebel commune were silent as they looked around at each other.

One man by the name of Orpon raised his hand, “I’ll help you.” In his late twenties, he had robes like most everyone else in the commune, and their color matched both his dark brown hair and eyes.

The others were still hesitant.

Kyoola spoke out, “I’m sorry, I know it’s selfish, and it’ll be very risky, so I understand if-“

Another man, Gilsabe, stood up out of his chair, and raised his voice, “I’ll help too. Kyoola has never asked for anything other than for what helps all of us. This is the first time she’s asked for something that only benefits her.”

This time a woman stood up, followed by two other men, and finally, another woman. It suddenly looked like everyone was going to help.

Kyoola put her hand out, “Thank you Francisa, Gurad, Hurosk, and Jorjasha. But please, that’s more than enough volunteers. We needn’t all go, otherwise, who’ll eat all the food we’ve gathered?”

Everyone chuckled.

Kyoola smiled at the volunteers, “Let’s all meet again here later tonight after we enjoy our dinners. I’ll go over my plan with you all then.”

The volunteers all eagerly nodded. Then everyone left and returned to their day’s tasks and activities.

Back in her room, Kyoola was skimming through some of her history books and family journals. A bowl of appetizing dewberries was at her side. Her room was small and bare, constructed from various woods and stones. The few belongings she had, consisted of a rickety bed with an old pink trileaf pillow and a patched dark purple lartandan fur blanket. There was also a small chest where she kept all her belongings.

A knock was heard at her door. "It's me," said Napalev.

Kyoola opened her door, "Yes?"

Napalev walked past her. "I am glad you've found volunteers to help you. And I know I told you I'd support you.... But might I ask that you reconsider this mission of yours? It may not be inherently dangerous, but surely you needn't risk such an endeavor so close to the start of a new season?"

Kyoola was annoyed, "Yes, I have to do this. I've been patient for far too long, always putting the needs of you and our commune first. And everyday I read these history books and my family's journals, and it kills me to sit around and do nothing."

Napalev sighed. "I understand. But things have been so unpredictable as of late. There's been more Krixter attacks, criminal activity is on the rise, and who knows what any of the revolters might be planning during this celebration you speak of. This might not be the wisest decision right now."

Kyoola's expression became perturbed, "And you're only waiting until now to tell me all this? Well it's too late, I've already committed to it, and it will be done."

Napalev shook his head a few times. "My dear Kyoola. This has always been one of your greatest strengths and weaknesses. From the day I met you in my history class at university, this is one of the primary reasons I knew you'd be a great member of my rebel commune. I only hope it does not cause you problems now."

"You know me too well. So please don't try to change my mind."

They stared at each other silently for a few moments.

Gilsabe entered the room, "Sorry, am I interrupting?" His long black hair was tied back and showcased his light blue eyes and fair skin. Gilsabe was probably the most attractive guy in the commune. He was a little over six feet tall just like Napalev.

Napalev shook his head, "No, no. I wasn't staying long. I have critical matters I must attend to for our commune. Now, if you'll excuse me." Napalev walked past Gilsabe and left the room.

Gilsabe leaned up against the wall. "Hey there fearless leader. How're you doing?"

"I'm quite nervous about this whole ordeal. And it doesn't help that only now Napalev is trying to talk me out of it."

"Well that's how he is. He'll support us, then after more thought, he'll start to weigh in with all the cons rather than the pros. So I get it. But think of it like this; it'll help you plan and prepare as best you can."

"I hope so. I've taken into account everything I could. And for the past few months, I've done plenty of my own reconnaissance out in the field."

"I'm not surprised. Sounds just like you, to be very thorough. You know, I've always liked that about you. As a matter of fact, I've always *liked* you."

"Then why didn't you volunteer first, immediately after I asked?"

"Heh, I wanted to see if any other guys might be interested in you too. And it looks like I was right about Orpon. He does fancy you, doesn't he?"

"He's just a good friend. Like you."

"Well, even if that's so, I'm sure you don't want to live your life in our commune, always alone."

"But I'm not alone. There's plenty of us here."

"You know what I mean. Look, whatever you want is fine with me, and I'm always willing to help you. Ever since you joined us, you've kept to yourself most of the time. Yet I had no problem helping you get familiar with everyone, and showing you how we did things around here. So, I was thinking, after we all help you with this personal goal of yours, then maybe, well, maybe you can think about me and you. And settling down together."

Kyoola looked away.

"You're only human Kyoola. You'll need someone to take care of you. And you have physical and intimacy needs like the rest of us." Gilsabe turned around and walked away.

3

Back in Choochahna forest, Vanblairz and Drasamer had moved to a clearing. Everything was calm and no animals were nearby. Beams of trisunlight were cast across the surrounding scalakta trees and their fruitful bubble gems. This caused reflections that looked like a dance of lights upon the ground and nearby carjee rocks.

In a move that seemed to shake the conscious, the Elf jumped confidently at the Trick Scout Light Striker, in a burst of energy that forced the earth to take shape around his feet as he plunged forth. Drasamer's sword lengthened and grew as the roots and petals spiraled straight at Vanblairz's chest. Vanblairz defended himself, swift and assured in the way that he rhythmically stepped around, and shifted his body side to side, in an inhuman way. Drasamer repeatedly lunged and stabbed at Vanblairz with an amused expression. The way the Elf attacked had an effect on all the nature around them. His fighting style caused trees, bushes, and the ground, to fluctuate in response.

Impressed by the Elf's conviction and precision, Vanblairz sensed his turn to retaliate. His trick blades spun around in circles that appeared like metallic rylil wheels in motion. The way Vanblairz tilted and leaned as he struck from various angles with winding, spinning attacks was perplexing. The cable that attached both his trick blades together stretched and flexed around him as he danced around it. His speed was definitely much more than human. Any less fighter would have been minced to pieces.

The two combatants traded turns this way for a few rounds, then found themselves locked in an unpredictable pattern of combat. Both fighters hollered bellowing cries whenever they thought their attack

had hit its mark. Drasamer fought wildly, yet restrained, keeping himself guarded and aware of every possible opening. Vanblairz seemed to enjoy himself, his mouth puckering to the side every now and then as he scanned Drasamer's fashionable clothes and weapon, wishing he could take a closer look. No matter how serious Vanblairz became, he always managed to keep an upbeat, fun attitude.

In his mind, Vanblairz was strategizing ways in which he could continue to stay several steps ahead of Drasamer. The Elf seemed more instinctive and fought like a furious yet clever predator. The rapier may have looked like a sizable pretty flower, but the power behind it seemed to split the very air itself. In contrast, Vanblairz's trick blades made a melodic whistle as he slashed at the Elf. This was further enhanced by the way Vanblairz had to swing his trick blades while weaving in and around the bow wire that kept them attached to each other. However, this allowed him to swing one trick blade out like a whip, ready to slice away anything in its path.

Drasamer's slashes and stabs were ferocious, feral, and volatile like an animal that had finally been freed from a lifelong cage. It was hard to decipher whether he gritted his teeth or grinned, but his orb-like eyes were locked onto Vanblairz. The Trick Scout maintained his cool and relied on his forward-thinking, and stylish adaptability. In all his years, he'd never fought an Elf before, and he was certainly being put to the test. Still, he managed to wink, after he spun around, narrowly avoiding a stabbing attack at his face. To create more distance, Vanblairz slid backward by spinning on his knees and doing the splits. He pressed his legs together, like a scissor, and stood back up. The Elf stopped to watch for a second. Vanblairz gave Drasamer another wink. The Elf smirked back.

The two of them spoke no words, yet both communicated their desire for victory, and mutual respect for one another with ease. Split seconds of near-fatal strikes turned into minutes that ramped up, faster and faster. . . .

For a moment they took a respite, to make sure they were not wounded by a strike they could not immediately feel or sense. . . .

Their breaths were shallow and steady. . . .

Neither wanted to back down.

Both untouched, impressed by the other's skill, they knew they would have to get even more serious. This friendly match was more intense than either of them predicted it would be.

But before the battle could continue, Vanblairz sensed another

being, and held out his hand, "Wait!"

Drasamer nodded and frowned. After a deep sigh, he blurted, "Don't worry, I know who it is."

In between the two men, a large bouquet of colorful flowers erupted from the ground. It stood nearly six feet tall. An adult female Elf stepped out and immediately approached Drasamer. Her dark green hair was long enough to travel down the entire length of her back, but instead, it remained in a semi-permanent state that floated behind her like a wavering cape in the wind. There was a slight orange tinge to her light skin and she wore several layers of translucent shimmery robes that whisked about as she walked. On her back were small sprouted insect-like wings that resembled a mosaic of different tints of red. She was close to Drasamer's age.

She yelled at Drasamer, "How dare you leave me back there waiting like that! All so you could-" She turned to Vanblairz with a vexed look. "What exactly is going on here?!"

Vanblairz sheathed his trick blades and raised his hands up to his sides, "Hi, I'm Vanblairz. A Trick Scout Light Striker. And you are quite the lovely Elf."

"My moniker is Fyolajana, and don't you forget it!" The female Elf looked like she was about to take out all her pent-up anger on Vanblairz.

Drasamer stepped to her side, and spoke quickly, "My love, I apologize. I was intrigued when I saw this Light Striker, and he agreed to have a friendly duel with me. One that has seemed to conclude in a draw for now."

Fyolajana was not pleased. "You did what?!"

Drasamer continued, "Please, let us return home." He gently took her hands into his. "I have a wonderful surprise waiting for you. Please my *halanawee*."

With her arms crossed and head held up high she took a moment to pause.

Drasamer was suddenly like a helpless child, begging for candy. "And we'll have our dinner tonight outdoors at the Esleya seashore restaurant. We'll have ziggleroot seaweed and dancebottom salad, your favorites. And it will be romantic, because there shall be plenty of fira fairies and singer fish. I promise."

Fyolajana relaxed her narrows eyes that were so sharp, it's like they cut Drasamer down to size. "Fine. But if you ever do something like this again, you'll be sorry. And if the Vel'spire *navlatra* knew about

this.....”

“There’s no need for that. Please, let’s go.” Drasamer recomposed himself, and once again put on the tough warrior attitude, and acknowledged Vanblairz, “Thank you for your honorable sportsmanship, Vanblairz of the upholders. I hope we shall meet each other again one day.”

Fyolajana glared at Drasamer, and cleared her throat, “Ahem.”

Drasamer gulped. “As friends of course. In a civilized setting, with no fighting.”

Vanblairz shrugged. “Sure. It was a pleasure. And uh, nice meeting you, Fyolajana. I wish you both safe travels.” He gave them an exaggerated smile and waved. Fyoloajana gave an even more sarcastic smile back.

Drasamer and Fyolajana stepped back into the large flower bouquet and were swallowed into the ground.