

THE STARS GO OUT

Written by

Morgan Holub

morganeholub@gmail.com
(919) 745-9621

FADE IN:

INT. THE CAVERN - NOMAN'S LAND, PLANET H132-ZED - NIGHT

Outside, a storm rages. Ice drives at the face of the mountain, but a long tunnel protects the cavern from the elements.

A small fire lights the interior, built haphazardly in an in-ground fire pit. Ominous shadows dance on the stone walls.

This cave was, at one point, a home. Signs of abandonment litter the faded tile floor- clothes spilling out of a half packed satchel, cabinets thrown open, a child's toy dropped in hasty exit. The table is still laid with dishes for a meal that was never eaten, layered with dust.

NATIYA (mid/late 30's, female) stands in the doorway, watching the storm. She is wrapped in an animal fur, long hair cascading down her back. She absentmindedly twirls a knife (made of deep, reflection-less black metal) in one hand.

NATIYA

What do you think happens when we die?

KASSRA (mid 40's, female) watches Natiya from next to the fire, cocooned within a pile of quilts and furs. Her gaze moves across Natiya's silhouetted figure, every few seconds snapping back to the knife as it spins and spins and spins.

KASSRA

(softly)
Are you afraid?

Natiya looks back over her shoulder. She raises an eyebrow in challenge. The firelight catches on the metal implants within her skin.

NATIYA

(smirking)
Are you?

KASSRA

Yes.

The smirk disappears. Kassra rolls her eyes, but fondly. She sits up, pulling on a loose fitting tunic and disentangling a quilt to wrap around her shoulders.

She takes a second to run the fraying edges through her fingers, admiring the handiwork and the detail and the care that holds it together.

Closing her eyes, she mumbles a few unintelligible words in a foreign tongue before touching two fingers to her lips, to her forehead, and dragging them across her left eyebrow.

When she looks up again, Natiya is watching her, frowning.

NATIYA

What was that?

Kassra stands from the makeshift bed, making her way across the floor.

KASSRA

A thanks of sorts, to the hands and their work.

She steps up behind Natiya, resting her chin on Natiya's shoulder and draping the quilt around them both. Kassra closes her hand around the hilt of the knife and wriggles it free from Natiya's grasp, resting it on a nearby ledge in the stone wall.

A flash of lightning crashes in the distance. Natiya shivers.

Natiya reaches a hand out to trace the pattern on the quilt. After a moment she closes her eyes and repeats Kassra's sign.

NATIYA

(softly)

I do not know the words.

KASSRA

The words are not important.

NATIYA

Say them anyway?

Kassra turns her face into Natiya's neck, whispers against her skin.

KASSRA

(melodic)

Af mai-eth hala, af dhan vaale.

Silence settles between them. They lean into each other, watching the storm, ice against stone.

NATIYA

We do not believe in the concept of...eternal death.

(MORE)

NATIYA (CONT'D)

Though our souls pass on, we- or,
our experiences and knowledge at
least, are gifted to a new one.
Reborn.

Beat.

NATIYA (CONT'D)

We are never truly gone.

KASSRA

Is that comforting?

NATIYA

It is...confusing.

Natiya plays with Kassra's fingers- it is hard for her to
keep her hands still.

NATIYA (CONT'D)

(thoughtful)

I am Natiya but Natiya is Chariya
and Sahliya and Diiya and many
others who no longer remember their
names. I have never been alone
inside my head. I am older than the
stars and younger than the trees.

She turns within the blanket, facing Kassra. Natiya lifts a
hand to trace the lines of Kassra's face- cheekbone, nose
ridges, the sharp cut of her jaw. She ends with her thumb
across Kassra's bottom lip, covering the tattoo-like marking
there.

NATIYA (CONT'D)

(tinge of frustration)

There is so much prejudice in my
people- anger, and hatred.
For...for your people. I have spent
this whole lifetime in unlearning.

Kassra pulls Natiya's hand away from her face, threading
their fingers together.

KASSRA

And what do you leave in its place,
kotch-ya?

A small smile flashes across Natiya's face- this word she
knows.

NATIYA

Nav dorru- a new guide. Those to
follow will know how to love.

Natiya presses up to kiss her, short and sweet, then tucks herself against Kassra's chest. The echo of Kassra's dual heartbeats is comforting.

NATIYA (CONT'D)

I want-

(pause)

How do I give thanks for you?

KASSRA

Ah- this.

Kassra guides Natiya's hand, bringing Natiya's littlest finger first to her lips, then her forehead, then swooping down to draw a line between the two hearts- or where the hearts would be if Natiya had two.

KASSRA (CONT'D)

(melodic)

Af mai-eth kotch aya, kera tet af
menedi oyin kot.

Natiya mouths an attempted repetition of the words.

NATIYA

What does it mean?

KASSRA

It does not translate well to
standard.

NATIYA

Try?

Kassra thinks on this a long moment. A gust of cold air whistles down the cavern, the fire flickering in response. Kassra tightens her arms around Natiya.

KASSRA

(humms)

Something like...

(pause)

It is an honor to love you, and I
will hold you for as long as I can.