

EPILOGUE

Cora flew.

The sky was the sky of Earth, but no one would be able to see her, as she maintained a field that bent all wavelengths of light around her, rendering her form invisible from any man-made detector. It was the same field that kept hidden her and Setebos’ home, an island in the middle of an ocean that used to be a landmass before the Reboot. As she flew, she saw their island, an ancient limestone mountain risen out of a deep blue sea, the top relatively flat and thick with green vegetation. But in one clearing was a field of hazel herb flowers surrounding a massive belajoun tree that served as her and Setebos’ private space. Looking down, she saw the three round tables already set, and she swooped down, her bare feet barely skimming the hazel herb, and then landed before her beloved, who looked at her, amused by her glee.

“You’re never going to get tired of that, are you,” he said. He set down the last platter of food – an assortment of smoked fish -- on one table.

“Tired of the fact that I can fly? NEVER.” She grinned, taking in the incongruity of an angel preparing a feast and setting the table. “Just like the fact that you can actually cook, even though you don’t need to eat.”

“Hey, you live with humans long enough, you learn to pick up a few things here and there,” he said. “Anyhow, we’re still early, so....” He took a running start and jumped, his wine dark wings materializing outward and beating down hard as he took off, quickly gaining altitude with every wing beat.

Cora looked up, seeing Setebos’ form against the bright, blue sky, and she felt her heart beating fast, as if about to burst. *You’re beautiful*, she sent.

Heh. Flattery will get you everywhere, he replied.

She stuck out her tongue, and she saw him laugh. Then Setebos shot up, higher and higher. Unlike Cora, who preferred to fly low, gliding along in circles and spirals, Setebos was like a rocket, climbing high into the atmosphere in a straight shot, to the edge of space. Watching him fly, Cora was still amazed that, as a Beatrice who crossed over with her body and soul still integrated, she had all of the same abilities as Setebos. That fact allowed for their life together, to live on Earth and monitor the status of any nephil who had survived the Reboot. Setebos would scan the planet from low-Earth orbit for any suspicious nephil activity, relaying information to Cora, who would then investigate any far-flung location.

But today was their holiday. Before breaking through the atmosphere, Setebos turned around and then dropped down like an unearthly peregrine falcon turned shooting star. His wings were folded back as he streaked across the sky. He pulled up before striking the waters and then leveled off, alighting in front of Cora once again.

“Show off,” she said.

“You love it,” he said, smirking, and swept her up. But then he felt the tell-tale pressure change of several portals appearing, and he set her down. “Rain check,” he said.

Cora looked up, taking in Setebos’ silver gray eyes, shining in triumph. “You better,” she said, her hand giving Setebos’ hand a meaningful squeeze.

They both turned to the line of portals, seeing their guests arrive in groups, to celebrate their first Day of the Dead together. Even though the dead outnumbered the living, that didn’t matter. On this island, where spacetime and timeless space intersected, the living could touch the dead, and Setebos and Cora warmly embraced every single one of them in welcome. They directed their guests to the round tables, where they clustered together like grapes. As Cora and Setebos finally sat down before the feast, Cora realized that everyone’s timeline were interwoven with everyone else’s, creating a fabric that was Setebos and Cora’s family.

Zack Fitzpatrick and his son Jamie ate rice, beef, and mango as they witnessed in amusement Zack’s wife Amy, who leaned forward and gossiped with Lexa, Jamie’s beloved. At their table also sat Zoey, who saw Ariel entertain twin preschoolers Janey and Eddie Babson with an energy ball that he would make appear and disappear. At one point, Zoey pointed out to Ariel, “They’re your grandchildren, too,” which almost made Ariel drop the energy ball in astonishment.

In another table, Malech fed baby Halim a soft rice porridge as Mara sampled the smoked fish, thick-cut chips, and strawberries dipped in chocolate. They both observed with empathetic smiles David and AJ comforting Ruth Babson, who wept upon holding her husband Will’s hands again. It had been a hard three months for Ruth, with Will’s death. Being able to touch him once again was a wish she had had for ninety days and ninety nights.

“Oh, love,” Will said.

In the table where Cora and Setebos sat, the Houses of Ilaeon and Kaldach were joined. Perse, Cora’s Ina, spoke of her adventures traveling the world as a young woman as Setebos, Helio, Machus, and Kirka listened, feasting on wine, roast meats, bread, and pomegranates. But Cora, Peri and Agem were not. Discretely, Cora saw Peri turn to Agem and say, “You never married.”

“I never married.”

“What am I to do with you?” Peri said, but his voice was kind. He reached out and held Agem’s hand, and Agem looked back at him with joy.

Agem then noticed Cora was watching and said, “Thank you, Cora.”

“For what?” she replied.

“For giving me the chance to be a good man, all that time ago.”

“Ah, Agem,” she said, reaching out and holding both her brother’s hand and the man she came to see as a brother, as well.

The day would turn to evening and then night, as they feasted and swapped stories under starlight and candlelight, before the scent of hazel herb and marigold, the little ones sucking on candy sugar skulls.

Conversation, both spoken and sent, filled up the evening, with some well-meaning albeit slightly drunken singing, instigated by Ruth Babson’s husband:

*O, my luv’s like a red, red rose
That’s newly sprung in June;
O, my luv’s like the melodie
That’s sweetly play’d in tune.*

“William Caleb Babson!” Ruth had chided, embarrassed at being the reason for her husband serenading a Robert Burns love poem in public. But then she had laughed at her own scolding, and she joined Will in the singing:

*Till a’ the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi’ the sun;
I will luv thee still, my dear,
While the sands o’ life shall run.
And fare thee weel, my only luv!
And fare thee weel a-while!
And I will come again, my luv,
Tho’ it were ten thousand mile.*

By the next day, their extended family was gone, having returned in the early morning hours to either Los Angeles, the Garden Paradise, Heavenly Elysium, or the compound of Central. The island needed clean-up, post-celebration, and then Cora and Setebos had to prepare for their patrol work. After catching some sleep, Setebos woke up first. He started to get out of bed.

“Hey.” Cora’s hand reached out from the warm confines of their ethereal bed. Her hand caught his hand, her fingers entwining with his. “You owe me a rain check – remember?”

Gray eyes met dark ones. Setebos felt the life giving energy of a tree that only existed on that island, and he felt the life giving love of a woman whose existence would always be a miracle to him. “Yes, ma’am,” he said. He returned to her, her warm body atop of his.

Work could wait for a bit.