

BROKEN PIECES

The first thing to notice when meeting this man was his eyes. They glowed, brilliantly blue, with an intensity that revealed the truth that lived within him. He had shoulder-length blonde hair, and he was clothed completely in a white robe. He held a glass flask close to his body, and the golden light that issued from it was dimmed, but the feeling of power it held was not. This flask held a golden orb of power that gave its owner the ability to see both the past and the future, and to manipulate the future, as long as the glass was not broken. It had been made many, many years ago, before the people had built the Great City of Echthrosⁱ, when the City of Filosⁱⁱ had just begun. The flask had been passed down through the generations of rulers, until it finally came to this one man clothed in white.

Yet the Man in White was not alone. A second man stood under the trees of Synoro Forest. He was tall and thin, and he was not at all noticeable. One's eye would not have been drawn to him, for he hid in the shadows. In the distance, a battle raged, between the small army of the first man, from the City of Filos and the vast army of the second man that dwelt in the Great City of Echthros.

"I told you never to refuse me anything." When the Whisperer spoke, it was completely in contrast with his appearance; his voice was warm and friendly, almost sickeningly sweet to hear.

"You can't do this," the Man in White stated calmly, still protecting his jar, "I won't allow it. You are a wicked man."

"I am here to do what I told you I would," continued the Whisperer, "now let me have it. You can't stop me."

The Man in White said nothing, knowing he could not stop the Whisperer immediately, but slowly extended his armⁱ and dropped the glass flask onto the forest floor. The Whisperer watched in horror as the flask fell to the earth in slow motion. The resulting crash echoed throughout the world. Pieces of glass went flying, and with a cry, the Whisperer wildly grasped the air in vain hope of retrieving some small fragment. As his

fingers touched the glass, his power flowed into the shards, not taking over the power of the Man in White but putting some of his own nature into them.

The Man in White faded into what looked like smoke, with a small sad smile on his face; the last of his power was left in evil hands. The Whisperer frantically gathered all the pieces he could from the ground with cut and bloody fingers. Hastily throwing them all in a bag, he began to run back to his army, calling for support.

When he arrived at the battle scene, the sight that met his eyes was the breaking moment for the Whisperer. His last two regiments were fighting for all they were worth, but to no avail. They had been utterly crushed by the Man in White's small army. The pride and the trust that he had put into these warriors had been destroyed, and they were getting their payment for letting him down. The Whisperer let out a raging cry of despair, and, clutching the broken pieces of a jar that had once done so much good, he abandoned his loyal army and fled.

When the Whisperer returned to his fortress underground, he spoke to no one. This was not difficult, as most of the loyal soldiers had marched into battle behind him. The Whisperer felt a stab of regret for abandoning the last battling warriors, but it was short-lived. They had not won. They did not deserve his recognition.

Inside his room, the Whisperer laid out the shards of glass carefully, and with precision he touched each individual one. Every piece he touched bonded immediately with its partner until all the pieces formed a flask once more. Barely grasping a thread of hope, the Whisperer lifted the flask in both of his hands and felt every inch of its surface. The wildly irregular beatings of his heart slowed instantly with immense disappointment as he felt a large chip in the bottom of the glass.

Rage boiled. Hatred grew. An incredibly intense loathing of the Man in White overtook all logical reason and sense. The Whisperer strode meaningfully but slowly out of the room. He voiced his wrath to the servant that immediately attended him; a single phrase:

"Kill him."

“But-But Sir,” stuttered the petrified serf at his side, “he has disappeared, this man that you - that you are so - so right - rightly angered with, your - your majesty, Sir.”

“Kill him.”

“I am ever - e - ever so s - sorry, your majestic m - m - majesty, sir. He is nowhere to be found!”

The Whisperer lashed out like a snake with a single, fluid motion, and the serf lay lifeless upon the ground. The Whisperer’s body began to shake with the tremendous fury caged up within.

“Kill him now,” he began softly, menacingly, “or you will all die, every one of you!” The end of the threat deafened all in the room. The Whisperer drew his sword, posed in his hand as if waiting for a challenger to approach him. No one dared.



The Synoro Forest was dark and foreboding, but that didn’t hinder Blythe. She ran with sure-footed, confident steps, keeping the light of the candle in the window of her home on the horizon. She had been out in the forest since clearing supper away, and her mother was sure to be worried about her. It wasn’t unusual for Blythe to be away for more than an hour after chores, and she never went deep into the forest, but all the same, she didn’t like to worry her mother. She had enough on her plate, with Grey’s hacking, bone-deep cough and her father’s struggle to make money during this drought. It was these things that caused Blythe to be anxious constantly; concerned that her brother was getting sicker, that her father would never be able to find work, and that her mother might collapse under the strain of trying to cope with it all.

Soon, Blythe glimpsed the large tree that served as a landmark for her, and she slowed slightly. The light still shone in the window brightly and she could nearly smell the home-made bread that was surely baking in the oven at this hour. Suddenly she cried out.

Before she truly felt the pain, she could sense something was wrong. And it wasn’t the pain of the sharp glass lodging itself in the soft underside of her foot as much as the

tingling sensation that followed, travelling up her leg and into her torso, settling somewhere around her heart. Coming to an abrupt halt, Blythe sank down on a nearby log to attempt to remove the shard from her foot. She pulled it out and held it in her hand, paying no attention to the blood still streaming onto the ground. Blythe could not tear her eyes away from the glass, covered partly in shining red blood, even when a warm voice issued from deep within the forest, whispering her name. She was seemingly unaware, completely enthralled with the mystery piece.

“Blythe,” the voice seemed to beckon to her, calling her name gently.

She murmured a response, eyes still glued to the shard.

“Blythe,” repeated the voice, more commanding this time. She was forced to obey; she couldn’t have kept looking at the glass even if she had desperately wanted to.

“Who’s there? Show yourself!”

“You cannot see me, Blythe, but I can see you. I know you are brave and can do much good in the world.”

“Who are you? How do you know me?” Blythe was fully aware now, having dropped the glass into her pocket, and she looked around wildly, trying to deduce the source of the voice.

“It’s alright,” continued the voice, “I won’t hurt you.”

“What’s happening?” Blythe continued to glance frantically around, and she started to stumble towards the edge of the forest.

“No- no- stay!” the voice grew louder, and Blythe’s pounding heart rose with it. She broke into a run. She didn’t stop until she reached her house. Bursting in the door, she breathed heavily before stepping into the kitchen.

“There you are, Blythe,” her mother began, “I was beginning to wonder where you had gone off to.” She sounded nonchalant, but Blythe could see the worry in her eyes. She muttered something about being exhausted, and Blythe went up to bed. As she took off her sweater and threw it on the ground, she heard the clinking of glass. Blythe reached into the

pocket and drew out the glass shard. She rubbed it almost lovingly and gazed at it for a long time. Then she heard the voice again.

“Blythe, why did you run?”

“Tell me who you are!” Blythe whispered.

“A friend,” the voice said simply.

“What do you want?”

“I want you to know what I am willing to do to be your friend. I know you are concerned about your brother, Grey, and your father’s work, and your mother’s worry. I can help you.”

“I don’t know where you are or who you are. Why should I trust you?”

“Let me show you.”

“...How?”

“Close your eyes.”

Blythe felt her eyes close of their own accord, and an image appeared.

A young woman and her brother walked in the twilight. It was a peaceful scene; the moon shone brightly, and the lack of sun was not noticed; this was the picture of content. There was just a moment to relish the blissful feeling when the image blurred suddenly. When it refocused, a different setting appeared. A large and beautiful house stood tall and majestic against the bright blue sky. The smiling, rosy-faced young woman sat on the steps, watching her children play in the garden. Shouts of excitement and laughter rang in the air, and an older couple sat beside her, laughing at the children’s antics. A wonderful golden glow seemed to accompany this vision, and it had a name: love.

The vision faded slowly.

“That young woman is you, Blythe.”

Blythe sat silently with her eyes closed for just a moment longer, holding onto the feeling of peace and love and happiness and bliss for as long as she could.

“All you have to do is one thing. Just one thing. That’s all.” The voice seemed to have unending patience, always with a kind and compassionate tone, ready and willing to help, and Blythe had been truly hoping that she could bring happiness to her family, but seemingly in vain for as long as she could remember. It was a ray of hope on a horizon of darkness, and she knew she could not afford to miss this chance.

“Tell me what you want me to do.”

“I noticed you have stumbled upon a glass shard. It is very special and important to me, and all I need for you to do is to return that piece to me.”

“Why should I?”

“An evil man, unfriendly and cold, has taken this from me. With this final glass piece, I will be able to regain my power and once again decide the fate of the world with consideration to all people.”

A pause. Blythe gathered all her courage.

“Wh-where do I go?”

“To the Western Bogs. I live in the heart of the swamp there.”

“Alright,” she said resolutely, and she dropped the glass shard onto her bedspread. The room went silent.

Yet Blythe’s conscience did not. Should she leave her family? It was just a voice; she could be making everything up. Yet those images and the accompanying feelings they evoked were so real... A decision seemed impossible. For Blythe it was a battle within her conscience; one side seemed to tell her that she should go, and that there was no other way to fix all the problems in her family, while the other reasoned with this, pointing out the absurdity of leaving home and family to chase after an unlikely solution. But Blythe couldn’t keep going without any hope of a solution. The blame seemed to rest on her for all these troubles: she was the one that got lost in the woods during the winter and caused Grey to come after her when he had no winter coat, starting his seemingly endless sickness; it was her that wanted to go to school and caused her father to lose all his money and eventually his job; and while she tried to help her mother as much as possible, Blythe only seemed to

add more stress to her life. This was a chance to prove herself. She could simply bring this lost piece of glass to the Western Bogs and return the power to its rightful owner. Her mother would be overjoyed and her father could find a job. Grey would be healthy again, and they would be better off. The friendly voice was so sincere... The voice ran through her head again: "I want you to know what I am willing to do to be your friend... I can help you..." Blythe's heartbeat rose in excitement as she thought of how she could make things right with her family again. It was worth it. She rolled over, contented with this conclusion, and slept.



There was no moon the next night. Blythe crept down the stairs, making no sound. Pausing slightly by her parents' bedroom, she could hear her father's soft snoring. Blythe drew the note she had written out of her pocket and set it outside their door. It explained why she was leaving and told them not to worry. Somehow, she figured they would anyways. *It's all worth it, Blythe told herself, in the end, they'll thank me for fixing all the problems we have right now. It's worth it.* She kept determinedly forward.

She reached into the kitchen cupboard and took a small loaf of bread with some cheese and stepped softly out the door. It was nearly pitch black; the only rays of light that shone were from the stars, few and far between. Blythe rolled an extra set of clothes around her meagre meal and strapped it to her back. Pausing by the door, she took her father's old compass from where it hung on the wall and pointed it westward. She set off.

It was impossible for Blythe to walk around the forest, for she could not see where it ended, and her compass pointed her directly into its heart. She ventured into the dark trees, hoping to find that there was a shorter distance through than there was in length. However, Blythe soon discovered that this was not the case. After walking until her feet ached and the sun's first rays shone through the few gaps in the trees, she lay down to sleep. When she finally woke, it was day again, and she gathered her belongings. One night seemed to blend into the next in her memory, and she slept wherever she could find shelter; under a bush, in the branches of a tree. Blythe found wild berries to eat once her bread and cheese was gone. A small river ran through the forest, and she followed it, gathering water whenever

she grew thirsty. It seemed that nothing would ever break the monotony of the endless trees.

However, as Blythe kept along her westward path, she began to feel as though something was lacking, and it took a day or two until she realised it: the birds were not singing. There was an unnatural quiet in the mornings when Blythe would wake. Unease flooded her, but it was tamped down by a growing sense of desperation. Would she ever get there? Would it be too late?

Often, she would reach into her pocket and take out the glass shard. She would run it between her fingers gently, and she would ask the voice to show her the things she had seen that night. Each time she saw the happiness and felt the peace and warmth, though, it was less real. The feelings were familiar, but they did not hold as much power over her mind; she could not hold on to them long after the images had faded. Walking along during the next few days, the eerie quiet in the forest seemed to increase, ringing in her ears. In addition to the lack of birdsong, Blythe could not remember the last time she had seen a small creature skitter along the forest floor, and even the usual rustling of the leaves in the forest was silenced.

One morning when she woke, she could see a fog so thick ahead of her it appeared as though the world ceased to exist where the fog began. Blythe got up slowly and stared at it, and a growing sense of assurance rooted itself in her mind. With but one thought, that of finally proving her worth, she haphazardly snatched her meagre belongings to herself. Blythe walked quicker, knowing that she was almost there; this was the Western Bogs. The white wall loomed closer and seemed to look down upon Blythe as she drew near. Slowing down, she reached her hand out tentatively, touching the fog to reassure herself that it was not solid.

Suddenly, she was overcome with a desperate need to hold the shard of glass that lay in her pocket. Blythe unconsciously drew the glass out and fingered it. The whisper that she remembered so clearly filled her mind once more.

“You’ve made it! You’ve been so brave, Blythe.”

“Where are you?” Blythe asked, just wanting to be done with this tiring journey.

“Just a few more steps. Keep going,” came the voice.

Blythe took a few hesitant steps forward into the fog. Once her eyes adjusted to the darkness within, she could make out the shape of a castle not far away. A black drawbridge lowered slowly, and she walked involuntarily forward into the castle. It opened into a hallway, stretching to the right and the left of Blythe. Doors lined the hallway on the far side, and the one right in the middle that Blythe faced as she walked in the door was the largest of them all. It had a wide granite header on it with a large marble keystone, beautifully crafted, and the door had ornate carvings on it. The rest of the doors had simple granite headers with no keystone, and their carvings were simple, causing the first door to stand out clearly. The castle was dimly lit; small grooves in the wall held candles, spaced far apart, and this was the only source of light.

Blythe stepped closer to the main door and turned the handle slowly. The door was silent as she pushed it open.

A hooded black figure stooped over a blazing fire. An iron stake had been thrust into the centre of the flames, and there was a rope off to the side of the room. The wall of enchantment that had been woven around Blythe’s mind prevented her from fully comprehending the meaning of all this. She paused for a single moment, and the hooded figure raised its head. That voice filled the room.

“Bring it to me,”

Blythe stepped forward, and the door immediately closed behind her, and a lock clicked into place. Her heart skipped a beat and began pounding, and her legs shook, yet her mind had no knowledge of this.

“Bring it now.”

Courage came from somewhere she could not name, and Blythe spoke. “You will help me.”

“Come here. Now,” the once calm and reassuring voice snapped on the last word. Blythe walked towards him and the glass shard began to heat up in her palm so quickly that the skin there soon grew red and blistered. Blythe didn’t notice. She stretched out her hand

to the Whisperer slowly but confidently, the enchantment performing its task with dreadful efficiency. Her palm was covered in blisters.

Blythe stood trembling involuntarily before the Whisperer, whose eyes were lit with an evil intention, reflecting the bright climbing flames between them. She could see it, but the true meaning did not penetrate the wall of enchantment that the Whisperer had slowly woven around her mind. Blythe swayed where she stood, and she closed her eyes...

A small casket lay beside a larger one. A weeping figure slumped hopelessly over the larger coffin, and a girl stood, numb with pain, beside the smaller one. It was impossible to feel joy or any other pleasant emotion, for pain and heartache filled everything until everything overflowed and ran into oblivion. The image blurred and re-formed into another setting. A dejected house barely stood on a flat plane, held up only by two beams at the front. A tired man leaned carefully against the doorpost, gazing out at the dry barren land he had toiled upon for many a year. It was a sorry sight, but there was nothing to be done. The situation was hopeless. This image swayed and was moulded into one final setting: despair. One girl, huddled in the rain, in the dark, a blanket encircling her body just as complete and total hopelessness seemed to surround the earth. Darkness closed in...

“No!” cried Blythe, and she snatched her hand back to her body.

This was a mistake.

She whirled around and tried to run but she could not move. The dark room seemed to close in around her and the beautifully designed door was far, far away; shrinking from her. Behind her she heard a deafening roar that filled the room and echoed a thousand times in her mind.

Then it stopped. Blythe felt as though she was being released from a giant’s crushing grasp; her body relaxed and ceased its shaking and trembling. Her lungs expanded fully for the first time in what seemed like months, and she took a deep, clearing breath. Suddenly a bright white light filled the room and the darkness fled as though frightened of the light’s power. Blythe was not frightened, however, though she did not know why. She did not know the source of the light, yet she felt that it could not be evil; there was a beauty about

it that could only come from something or someone completely good. When Blythe did turn around, she saw a tall man with dazzlingly blue eyes that twinkled softly as he smiled at her.

“Well done, Blythe,” he said, and his voice was a source of warmth in the cold room. As Blythe walked out the door with this man, he told her a great many things, beginning with what the Whisperer had done.

The evil man thrived off of the trust of other people. The trust of a whole city had sustained his life for many years, until the battle at the Great City of Echthros, when a great deal of them were killed. Some of the few survivors saw that loyalty to this man was hopeless after the battle and fled the country. The last servants remained true to the Whisperer, but in his rage and disgust at their inability, he had killed them all, and his only remaining hope had rested on Blythe. Her wavering trust at the beginning had caused him to be weak and sickly, but as he cunningly tricked her, and she more strongly believed his sugar-coated lies, he grew stronger. The Whisperer had lured her through his deceitful and false friendship; his ultimate motive to gain the power he had desired for so long, and to destroy the Man in White forever. In his great anticipation and excitement as Blythe stretched out the last remaining link to this power, he had forgotten to control the little power he did have, allowing Blythe a glimpse of what was truly going to happen if she obeyed the Whisperer to the last. With her trust broken, he had vanished into nothing.

“And what will happen to my family now?” asked Blythe, “do they know where I am?”

“All will be well,” replied the Man in White, “I promise.”

And when Blythe returned home, she found Grey waiting for her, rosy-cheeked and healthy, her mother smiling, and her father returning home from work. She ran right into their embrace.

ⁱ *Echthros* is Greek for *enemy*

ⁱⁱ *Filos* is Greek for *friend*