

These Tragic Souls and a Sword Reborn in an Intergalactic Space Opera

Story Intro: "Welcome! I'm an evil god, though not that evil of a god!" is what they woke up to. Join our heroes and heroines, having just met their demise, displaced by an extradimensional event."

Story Starts

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Book 1 - The Empty Twin

Ch 3.7 Into the Deep

Rose couldn't remember the last time she'd felt that angry.

Maybe with Sirius. The night the veil swallowed him and she'd turned on Bellatrix with nothing but spite and a wand, the Cruciatus Curse tearing out of her throat before her mind caught up. That had been volcanic—grief-scorched and clumsy, the curse sputtering because she hadn't truly meant it. Not the way Bellatrix had.

This was different.

The Cruciatus held steady against the Weapon's hide, and Rose didn't waver. Her wand arm locked straight, her jaw clenched so hard her molars ached, and the red-black torrent of agony poured from the Elder Wand's tip into flesh that had no right to still be alive. The creature writhed. Its exposed magicite flickered. Good. She wanted it to flicker. She wanted it to *break*.

Somewhere beneath the fury, a clinical part of her brain catalogued the wrongness. The rage felt borrowed. Worn like someone else's coat—too large, too heavy, fastened tight around her chest. She recognised the shape of her own anger well enough to know this wasn't entirely hers. Yet her cold gaze remained fixed on the beast below, and she did not care. Let the rage be artificial. Let it be handed to her by whatever cosmic joke had landed them in this pit. It served.

The Weapon's secondary face contorted. Its magicite stuttered and destabilised under the sustained curse, and for one brilliant moment, Rose thought—

"Rose."

Ryuu's voice cut through the arena like a blade through silk.

"Tend to Shirou."

A switch flipped.

The rage evaporated—not gradually, not in stages, but instantly, as though someone had pulled a plug at the base of her skull and drained every drop of borrowed fury through the floor. Rose gasped at the absence. Her wand arm dropped. The Cruciatu winked out.

She was already banking hard on the broom before her conscious mind issued the command, the wind howling past her ears as she dove toward the crumpled shape on the arena floor. Behind her, Ryuu's battle cry split the air—a sound that was half roar, half sob—followed by the wet, meaty impact of cursed metal meeting monster flesh. The arena strobed vermillion.

Rose didn't look back.

She hit the ground running, her broom clattering away behind her as she skidded on her knees across shattered stone. Dust and ash billowed. She reached the body and—

'Oh god.'

Shirou Emiya lay face down on the arena floor, and for a terrible, frozen heartbeat Rose wasn't certain it was him. The left side of his torso was ruin. Charred muscle and cracked bone visible where skin had been, the edges of the wound still faintly glowing with residual heat. His clothing had fused to his flesh in ragged patches. The smell hit her—burnt meat and hot metal—and her stomach lurched hard enough to make her vision swim.

'Don't you dare. Don't you dare be dead, you stupid, stubborn sword-for-brains—' Using the nickname both Rin and Illya threw at him jokingly, because she had no other thoughts to direct her outrage.

She crouched lower, hands hovering uselessly over his back, afraid to touch him, afraid not to. His back—she could see it now, through the remnants of his shredded shirt. A rune. Carved or branded or *grown* into the skin between his shoulder blades, limned in faint amber light: Sannr.

Rose could read it.

'Battle Continuation.' A runic inscription. The glow pulsed steadily. Not fading. Not flickering.

'He's alive. The rune's still active, which means he's alive.'

She pressed her cheek to the unburnt stone beside his face and listened. For a terrible second—nothing. Then: a breath. Faint. The barest expansion of his ribcage, shallow and wet-sounding and wrong, but *there*. Rose let out a noise she'd deny making until her dying day—a strangled, involuntary whimper of relief that she swallowed before it fully escaped.

Something else caught her attention. A glow, warm and amber-gold, emanating from his chest. Not the rune on his back—this was different, coming from beneath him, visible only as a corona of light seeping outward along the stone where his torso pressed against it. She wanted to turn him over, wanted to see what it was, wanted to understand what was keeping him alive when every medical instinct she possessed said he shouldn't be—

'Don't move him.'

The healer protocols Hermione had drilled into her during Project Noah kicked in, overriding every other impulse. Unless his breathing stopped, turning him could kill him faster than whatever was already happening inside his body.

Behind her, the arena shook. Ryuu screamed something in a language Rose didn't recognise, and a detonation of vermillion light turned the world red for

three full seconds. Stone fragments rained down. Rose hunched over Shirou's body, shielding his head with her arms, her back taking the impacts of rubble that would have struck his exposed wounds.

'Focus. Diagnosis first. Then triage. Then treatment. Focus, Potter.'

She drew the Elder Wand and cast.

"Appare Vestigium Corporis."

The diagnostic spell unfurled from her wand tip—a lattice of golden light designed to map injuries, detect internal bleeding, catalogue fractures. Standard field medicine. She'd cast it a thousand times during the war, on bodies far more damaged than this. The spell drifted downward toward Shirou's back.

And slid off.

Rose blinked. The golden lattice touched his skin and simply... ran away. It cascaded over the surface of his body and dispersed, as though she'd poured water onto oiled leather. Not a single thread of diagnostic magic found purchase.

"What—"

She cast again. Harder. More intent behind it, the Elder Wand thrumming in her grip.

The spell washed over him and rolled off. Every strand of diagnostic magic sloughed away the instant it contacted his body. Her magic couldn't touch his. It wasn't resistance—it wasn't a ward or a shield or any form of active rejection. His body simply refused to interact with her magical signature. Hydrophobic, in the most literal sense she could imagine.

"Come on—"

A third attempt. She poured enough power into the spell to light up the entire arena floor, the Elder Wand blazing white-gold in her fist. The diagnostic lattice descended like a net.

It ran off him like rain off glass.

"Bloody useless piece of—"

Rose's fist hit the stone beside Shirou's head. Pain lanced through her knuckles. She welcomed it. The frustration was acid in her throat—she was crouched over a dying man, armed with the most powerful wand in the history of her reality, and she couldn't even *diagnose* him.

The arena shuddered again. Something massive collapsed in the distance. Ryuu's vermillion light flickered, dimmed, then surged back with a fury that painted the ceiling in shades of arterial red.

'Think. Think, think, think—'

And then something reached for her.

Not physically. Not magically—not in any way she'd been trained to identify or defend against. Something extended its awareness from within her—or perhaps from beyond, pressing inward, like a finger pushing through the membrane of a soap bubble. It touched a place inside Rose that she hadn't known existed. Somewhere behind her sternum, to the left, just above where the scar tissue from the Killing Curse lay white and raised beneath her breast.

Hope.

That was the flavour of it. Not the fragile, breakable sort she'd carried through the war—the kind that could shatter if you looked at it too hard, the kind that Dumbledore had cultivated in her like a hothouse flower and she'd resented him for it ever since. This was something older. Fiercer. The hope of defiance—the desperate, teeth-bared refusal to accept the world as it was. The means to hold fate—yours, theirs, everyone's—in your own hand and reshape it.

Rose's breath caught. Her fingers tightened on the Elder Wand. She could feel it—just at the edge of her reach, a door she could push open, a power that might let her—

"How dare you encroach upon my domain."

The voice struck her like a physical blow.

Cold. Female. Each syllable precise as a scalpel and resonant as a cathedral bell, the kind of voice that didn't raise itself because it had never needed to. It was both unnerving and melodious—a frost-rimed hymn sung in a minor key—and it came from everywhere and nowhere, bypassing her ears entirely to resonate directly in the marrow of her bones.

The presence of hope recoiled. Not in fear—in recognition. The way a trespasser freezes when the owner of the house turns on the light. Not afraid. Caught.

"I have allowed the being of wrath passage, as its nature overlaps with mine. Violence and death have walked together since the first blood was shed." A pause. The cold deepened—not temperature but *presence*, the weight of a glacier calving into an ocean. "But you. A being of change. A being who would defy fate. Who would defy my inevitability."

The last word landed like a tombstone.

Rose opened her mouth to respond—to argue, to curse, to do *something*—

She blinked.

The arena was gone.

The noise of Ryuu's rampage—gone. The heat, the ash, the smell of Shirou's burnt flesh—gone. The stone beneath her knees had been replaced by nothing. She stood in a vast emptiness, a void so complete it should have been darkness but wasn't. It was simply absence—colourless, directionless, without horizon or boundary—save for the clusters of light scattered across the infinite distance like stars viewed from the wrong side of the universe.

Rose's breath misted in front of her, though she couldn't feel cold. Her boots rested on nothing. The Elder Wand hummed in her grip—a low, anxious vibration she'd never felt from it before. The wand that had faced Voldemort without trembling was *nervous*.

'Where—'

Her back met something solid.

She spun, wand raised, a hex half-formed on her lips—and came face to face with Ryuu.

The elf was just as startled. Her sky-blue eyes were wide, her pale hair loose and tangled with ash, dark vermillion residue still fading from her forearms. But the burns were gone. The cracked ribs, the split skin, the fused hands—all of it mended, as though someone had reached into the last five minutes of Ryuu's existence and gently pressed *undo*. She looked as though she'd just stepped out of her room, refreshed and whole, ready to start the day.

They stared at each other.

"Rose?"

"Ryuu."

A beat.

"Where are we?" Rose asked.

"I don't—"

Three voices spoke at once.

"Child, you have been acknowledged."

The words didn't echo. They *were* the echo—the vibration that preceded sound, the silence after thunder, the resonance that made the clusters of light tremble in the void. The voices layered over one another: one cold and deep,

one warm and clear, one sharp and bright. Together, they created a chord that Rose felt in her teeth.

And then—presence.

Not arrival. Not appearance. Rose would have sworn under Veritaserum that nothing had moved, nothing had changed, nothing had materialised in the void around them. Yet suddenly she was aware of them, and the awareness was the kind of thing that fundamentally reorganised one's understanding of scale.

Titanic was inadequate.

Colossal was laughable.

Rose's head tilted back. And back. And further back.

Her neck ached. Her eyes watered. She was staring upward into the void, trying to find the edges of what she was perceiving, and there were no edges. The beings before her occupied space in a way that defied geometry—not merely large but *absolute*, their presence filling the void without displacing it, existing on a scale where Rose and Ryuu were not insects, not grains of sand, but something smaller still. Motes. Particulates. The brief, bright flicker of a neuron firing in the brain of something that dreamed on a cosmic scale.

'They were always here,' Rose realised, and the thought carried a weight that made her knees buckle. *'They were always here. We just didn't notice.'*

That was the worst part. Not the size—size she could process, *had* processed, had once watched a basilisk the length of a Quidditch pitch rise from the Chamber's depths and felt the same lurch of comprehension. It was the certainty that these beings had been present the entire time she and Ryuu had stood in this void, and that her mind had simply... edited them out. The way the eye skipped over its own blind spot. They had become visible only because they chose to be, and the transition from absence to awareness felt like waking from a dream she hadn't known she was having.

Then the void shifted.

One blink. That was all it took. The infinite distance between them collapsed—not closing, not shrinking, simply ceasing to exist—and Rose found herself standing before three faces.

Three pairs of eyes, each one large enough to swallow continents.

She felt like dust.

Dust regarded by starlight.

The three voices spoke again, simultaneous, and this time they carried names.

"Welcome, Bearer of the Hallows, Keeper of the Boundary, Last Scion of the Peverell Line, She Who Returned from Beyond the Veil."

That voice—the cold one. It addressed Rose, and Rose alone. She turned toward its source.

The goddess was pale. Not fair-skinned in the way of Ryuu or Hermione, not porcelain in the way Rose herself was—pale in the way of deep ice. Of bone exposed to moonlight. Of something that had never been warm and had never needed to be. Her skin held a blue-white luminescence, and her hair fell in cascades of absolute black, each strand distinct against the void as though darkness itself had a gradient and she occupied its deepest register. Her face was beautiful in the way that a glacier was beautiful—carved, ancient, indifferent to admiration. Her eyes were voids. Not dark. Not black. *Void*. They held depth without colour, dimension without light, and when Rose met them she understood, on an instinctual level deeper than thought, that those eyes had watched the first thing die and would watch the last.

Rose's hand tightened on the Elder Wand. The wand pulsed once against her palm—not in warning, but in acknowledgement. It *recognised* something in that gaze.

"Welcome, Starchild. Child of the Hearth and Home. Child of Family. Child of Innocence and Purity. Child of Justice."

The other two voices, layered together—one warm, one bright—addressed Ryuu. Rose caught fragments: *counterparts who walked amongst you, and they have sent their requests through the bonds we share, and a boon for the child they could not protect*—but the specifics blurred, two conversations occupying the same space without interference.

"I am the Goddess Astraea."

The voice was sharp and bright, a blade of starlight given speech. The face it belonged to was angular and arresting—high cheekbones, a strong jaw, eyes that burned the pale gold of a winter sunrise. Her hair was the deep indigo of a sky at the moment before full dark, pulled back from her face in severe lines that accentuated the geometry of her features. She looked nothing like what Ryuu had described of her patron—no gentle smile, no maternal warmth. This Astraea was a scales made flesh: balanced, unyielding, gorgeous in the way that symmetry was gorgeous. Precise and unforgiving.

"I am the Goddess Hestia."

Warmth. The voice carried warmth the way a hearth carried fire—not aggressively, not as a weapon, but as a fundamental property of its existence. The face was rounder than Astraea's, softer, with wide-set eyes the colour of embers banked for the night—deep amber bleeding to orange at the edges. Her hair was a rich chestnut brown, falling in loose waves around a face that radiated welcome and repose. She was beautiful in a way that made you think of home—of kitchens and candlelight and the moment you stepped through the door after too long away. Yet there was an aloofness to her gaze, a distance that said she observed the hearth fire but was not consumed by it. She tended. She did not cling.

"I am the Goddess Hel."

The cold one. The void-eyed one. Rose felt the name settle into her bones like permafrost—not a wound, but a *fact*. A piece of information even her skeleton would carry from this moment forward, regardless of what her mind decided to do with it.

All three spoke at once, addressing both women, yet Rose heard them each as clearly as if they'd spoken in sequence. Three distinct threads of meaning, woven simultaneously into her consciousness without tangling.

Hel's thread was addressed to Rose.

"Your ancestors walked the boundary between my domains, Bearer. The brothers Peverell—they did not find Death's gifts by chance. They were chosen. Avatars of my counterpart—the aspect of Hel that governs your native reality. She shaped them. She tested them. The youngest proved worthy."

Rose's mouth opened. Closed.

'The Peverell brothers. The Deathly Hallows. The Tale of Three Brothers.'

She'd spent years—*years*—dissecting that story. Beetle the Bard's fairy tale. Dumbledore's obsession. The Hallows themselves: Cloak, Stone, Wand. She'd held all three. She'd walked into the Forbidden Forest with them and chosen to die. She'd met the thing on the other side—the presence at King's Cross, the quiet intelligence behind the veil—and she'd come back.

And now a goddess the size of a galaxy was telling her that the figure from a children's story had been... what? An alternate version of herself?

"That particular Hel—your reality's aspect—has sent a request through the channels that bind our greater self." The void-eyes held Rose's gaze with the patient, absolute attention of entropy. It did not hurry. It had never hurried. It would never need to. "She has asked me to grant you a boon."

Simultaneously, Astraea and Hestia addressed Ryuu. Rose caught fragments—*counterparts who walked amongst you, and they have sent their requests through the bonds we share, and a boon for the child they could not protect*—but the specifics blurred, two conversations occupying the same space.

'Different versions. Different versions of the same goddess.'

The question formed before she could stop it, and it must have shown on her face—or perhaps the gods simply read thought at this scale—because Hel answered.

"Yes." A pause. The void-eyes shifted, and Rose felt the weight of that shift like a change in atmospheric pressure—the air in her lungs compressing, her eardrums flexing. "I am part of the greater aspect known as Hel. We are all separate, yet the same. Part of the whole, yet individual. Each reality births its own reflection of us, shaped by the beliefs and needs of those who dwell within it. Your Hel is me. I am not your Hel. We share a name, a domain, a purpose—but our experiences diverge as the realities that house us diverge."

Astraea's voice threaded through the silence that followed. "We are both the goddesses you knew, and not." Her winter-sunrise eyes found Ryuu's. "The Astraea who led your Familia—she is my reflection. My counterpart. She walked among mortals in a way I never have. She loved in a way I cannot. Yet she is me, and what she felt for you, I understand."

Ryuu's hand tightened on nothing—her weapons were gone, healed away along with her wounds, and her fingers closed on empty air with a grip that would have cracked a sword's hilt.

Hestia spoke next, her ember-gaze resting on Ryuu with that peculiar blend of warmth and distance. "I see your mistrust. Both of you." Her eyes flickered to Rose. "But you can feel the truth in our declaration, can't you?"

Rose could. That was the unsettling part. She couldn't explain the mechanism—it wasn't Legilimency, wasn't Veritaserum, wasn't any form of truth-compulsion she recognised. It was simpler and more absolute than that. The words the goddesses spoke carried their own verification, like mathematical proofs that resolved the moment you heard them. She could choose to disbelieve, the way she could choose to disbelieve gravity, but the result would be the same: she'd fall.

She glanced at Ryuu. The elf stood with her spine straight and her healed hands trembling, and Rose could see the war playing out behind her

eyes—the desperate need to believe warring with the warrior's instinct to question. Ryuu had told them about her reality during those first few nights in the tent—gods and goddesses walking amongst mortals, granting blessings called falna, building families. Ryuu's patron had been Astraea—goddess of justice—and she'd served in a familia tied to the hearth goddess Hestia through bonds of alliance and shared purpose.

These were not those goddesses.

But they were.

Rose shook her head. The metaphysics made her teeth itch.

The three voices aligned again, and this time the chord they struck vibrated with formal weight—the resonance of oaths older than language, older than the concept of language, older than the species that had invented the concept of the concept.

"We are here as a favour to our counterparts."

Astraea and Hestia, to Ryuu: "We are here to renew your vows to the stars and justice, and grant upon you our blessing."

Hel, to Rose: "I am here to accept your vow to the River Gjöll. To grant you passage to touch upon my domain without losing your way."

Rose's mouth went dry.

The River Gjöll. She'd read about it in passing—Hermione's old mythology textbooks, gathering dust in the Grimmauld Place library during the long, grey months between the war's end and Project Noah's beginning. The river that flowed nearest to Hel's realm, ice-cold and knife-edged, the boundary between the living and the dead in Norse cosmology. To have passage across it—to touch upon Death's domain without losing her way—

'What does that actually mean?'

The implications stacked up fast enough to make her dizzy. The Elder Wand. The Resurrection Stone. The Cloak of Invisibility. Three objects that had always been *keys*—she'd known that, had felt it every time she'd held all three simultaneously, that sense of a door just out of reach, a threshold she could feel but not see. And now a goddess of death was offering to show her where the locks were.

But one thing overrode all of it. One thing that had been screaming in the back of her skull since the moment the void swallowed her, since the moment she'd been pulled away from the charred body on the arena floor.

"Shirou."

Rose's voice came out rougher than she intended. Beside her, Ryuu spoke at almost the same instant, the elf's composure cracking for the first time since the void had claimed them:

"Will we be able to save him?"

The question hung in the void between mortal and divine—small and desperate against the infinite backdrop, two women asking three gods to help one man.

Hestia answered first.

The warmth in her expression didn't falter, but something behind it shifted—a door closing softly, a fire banked to embers. She shook her head, and the motion was slow, final, and carried a sadness that felt inherited rather than personal. Grief passed down through reflections.

"The hearth and home has no claim over his lost and tragic soul." Each word measured, weighed on some invisible scale and found wanting—not the words, but the situation they described. "He shed his home once—abandoned it, burned it, walked away from the hearth that bore him. And the home he gained after..." A pause. The ember-eyes dimmed. "It perverted his ideals. Twisted the warmth he carried into fuel for a furnace that was never meant to burn that hot." She met Ryuu's gaze. "I have no blessings to give the Færing.

He is beyond my reach—not because he is unworthy, but because the hearth cannot warm a man who no longer recognises its fire."

Ryuu flinched. The motion was small—barely a twitch of her shoulders—but Rose caught it. And she understood, even without context, what that flinch contained: the recognition of someone who'd also lost their home and rebuilt it from rubble.

Astraea spoke next.

Her smile was haunting. Not cruel, not kind—haunting, in the way that a half-remembered melody was haunting, in the way that justice itself was haunting when you understood that it could not always arrive in time.

"Ah." The word carried centuries. Millennia. An eternity of watching mortals break themselves against their own ideals. "The son who inherited the hopes and dreams of the father and the spirit. The boy who took a dead man's ideal and wore it as armour, then forged it into a blade, then *became* the blade itself." The winter-sunrise eyes glittered. "Yet in the end, he walks his own path. Stumbling, bleeding, breaking his bones against every wall the world erects—but his path, nonetheless."

She tilted her head, and the angular geometry of her face caught light that had no source.

"Only once the Færing has regained his justice shall I provide my blessing upon him. He must find it himself. I will not hand it to one who has not yet earned the right to hold it." The haunting smile widened fractionally—not with cruelty, but with the detached anticipation of someone who'd placed a bet and was looking forward to seeing how it played out. "In the meantime—he shall serve as entertainment."

Rose bristled. Beside her, she felt Ryuu go rigid.

Before either could speak, Hel's voice rolled through the void like a tide of black water—slow, inexorable, carrying the weight of every ocean that had ever frozen.

"Ah, the Færing." Something shifted in those void-eyes—not warmth, nothing so human, but a flicker of... recognition. The acknowledgement of one who worked with the dead recognising something of her trade in the living. "His soul is shackled to counterparts beyond counting. Across the lattice of realities, the reflections of this one boy have been pressed into service as guardians of human survival—each one bound, each one harvested, each one wielded as a weapon until the blade itself forgot it had ever been anything else." Her voice dropped, and the cold deepened into something that bordered on reverence—the only warmth death could offer, which was the warmth of finally being *seen*. "The offerings those counterparts have rendered—the lives they have taken in humanity's name—would stain the oceans of a thousand earths red. An eternity of slaughter, freely given, for a gratitude that never came."

Silence.

Rose's stomach turned. She thought of Shirou's eyes—golden, steady, tired in a way that had nothing to do with sleep. She thought of the way he cooked for everyone before eating himself. The way he Traced weapons without hesitation and fought without complaint. The way his hands were calloused and scarred and gentle when they needed to be. The way he'd apologised for scanning them with more genuine remorse than most people showed for actual crimes.

And she thought of what Hel had just described—an infinity of versions of that same man, each one ground to dust in service of humanity that never thanked him—and she couldn't connect the auburn-haired idiot who argued with brownies about stock seasoning to the cosmic tragedy the goddess had just laid bare.

Except she could. That was the horrible part. She could see it in the tired eyes. She'd just chosen not to look.

"Can he be saved?" Rose repeated. Her voice didn't crack. She wouldn't let it.

Hestia's ember-eyes found hers. The warmth returned—not pitying, but steadying. A hand on the shoulder. A fire in a dark room.

"I can sense your frustration." Gentle. Firm. "Fear not for the Færing. He too has benefactors. A plot and passage that goes past the beyond." A beat. "He is not ours to save. But he will not be abandoned."

Rose exhaled. The breath shook on the way out, and she let it. Some things you didn't control.

"Now." The three voices realigned, the chord striking again with that formal, ancient weight. "Do you accept?"

Rose looked at Ryuu.

The elf's face was pale beneath the ash and the dried vermillion residue. Her sky-blue eyes were glassy with unshed tears—the first Rose had ever seen from her, the first crack in the wall Ryuu maintained between herself and the things that could hurt her. Her jaw was set in a line so tight the tendons in her neck stood out like cables.

Ryuu looked back at her.

'She's thinking the same thing I am.' Rose realised it with the certainty of someone who'd been in enough life-or-death situations to read the calculus of desperation in another person's eyes. *'That we don't have a choice. That we never had a choice—not really. That saying no means walking back to that arena with nothing, and Shirou dies on the floor, and the Weapon kills us, and the dungeon swallows everything.'*

But that wasn't the whole truth. Rose had spent her entire life raging against the absence of choice—against prophecy, against Dumbledore's grand plan, against the universe's apparent need to slot her into the role of sacrifice. She hated the P-words. Prophecy. Predestination. Preordained. She hated them with the specific, focused venom she usually reserved for Dark Lords and people who put milk in before the tea.

And yet.

The goddesses hadn't lied. She'd felt the truth in their words the way she felt gravity—absolute, indifferent to her opinion. Shirou was dying. Ryuu was depleted. Rose's magic couldn't touch him. The Weapon was reforming.

But the implications—the vows, the blessings, the architecture of divine favour that the three goddesses were constructing around them—those weren't chains. They were tools. And Rose Potter had spent a lifetime picking up tools that weren't meant for her and using them anyway.

Her resolve settled into her spine like a steel rod.

She met Ryuu's eyes and nodded once.

Ryuu nodded back.

They spoke together.

"I accept."

The void rang.

Not with sound—with *consequence*. The words left their mouths and acquired weight, mass, trajectory. Rose felt her acceptance travel outward from her chest and strike something vast and immovable, like a coin dropped into a well so deep it took an age to hit the water. When the impact came, it resonated through every fibre of her being—not painfully, but *permanently*. She would carry the echo of this moment in her bones for the rest of her life. However long that turned out to be.

Astraea moved first.

Her winter-sunrise eyes blazed, and the sharp, bright voice filled the void with a clarity that felt like the first light of dawn breaking over a battlefield—not gentle, not kind, but *necessary*. The light that showed you where the dead lay and where the living still stood.

"Ryuu, daughter of the stars and justice, shall wield its stellar splendour."

Light gathered around Ryuu. Not the green luminescence of her Luminous Wind—this was older, purer, the cold white fire of distant suns compressed into a corona that settled over the elf's shoulders like a mantle. Ryuu gasped. Her spine straightened—not from effort but from *recognition*, the way a body straightened when it heard music it had been born knowing. The ash on her skin burned away, and for a moment she shone with the light of the star she'd been named for.

Hestia spoke next.

"Ryuu, daughter of home and family, shall become the standard bearer of the hearth." Her ember-eyes softened—not with pity, but with the specific gentleness of someone returning a lost possession to its owner. "I shall grant you a boon drawn from your previous Familia—a reflection of what was carried in their hearts. My blessing bears no benefit upon your current circumstance, but what was built around that fire... that, I can return to you."

A second light joined the first—warmer, deeper, the amber glow of a fire tended through the longest night. It wove through the stellar corona, braiding warmth into radiance, and Ryuu made a sound that Rose had never heard from the composed elf—a small, choked noise of recognition, as though she'd caught the scent of a home she'd thought destroyed. A place. A time. People she'd loved and buried, of those comrades she unfortunately left due to the dragon's attack, and carried in the silence between her heartbeats ever since.

Hel turned to Rose.

The void-eyes were patient. The pale face expressionless. And yet—somewhere in the absolute zero of that gaze—Rose thought she detected something that might, in a being less cosmic, have been approval. The faintest warming of a thing that had never been warm. Not affection. Recognition. One keeper of death acknowledging another.

"Rose, daughter of the boundary and the grave, shall walk the frozen depths unscathed." The words settled over Rose's skin like snowfall—cold, light, inexorable. Each syllable a crystal. Each crystal a commitment. "I grant you

passage to touch upon my domain without losing your way. The living world has no shelter for the burden you bear, Bearer. The Hallows you carry were not gifts—they were keys. And now, at last, you shall learn what doors they open."

Cold.

Absolute, breathtaking cold—not painful, not even unpleasant, but *thorough*. It entered through the scar beneath Rose's left breast and radiated outward, tracing the pathways of her magical core, flowing through her veins like ice water poured into a warm bath. The sensation was intimately familiar—she'd felt it before, twice. Once in the Forbidden Forest, when she'd walked to her death. Once at King's Cross, when she'd walked back. The cold of the threshold. The cold of the place between.

The Elder Wand in her hand sang—a single, clear, sustained note, like crystal struck with a tuning fork—and for one impossible instant Rose felt the boundaries of the living world thin around her. She could sense it—the River Gjöll, distant yet accessible, a frozen highway threading through dimensions that the living had no business knowing about. She could feel the edges of Death's domain the way she could feel the edge of a cliff in the dark: present, definite, survivable only if you knew where to put your feet.

The cold settled. Became part of her. Not a visitor—a resident. Something that would live in the space between her heartbeats from this moment forward, quiet and patient and absolute.

Rose breathed in.

The void began to fade. The light clusters dimmed. The three titanic presences receded—not departing, not diminishing, simply returning to the state of being-always-there-but-unnoticed that they'd occupied before. The cosmic blind spot reasserted itself. The eye resumed its habit of skipping over what it couldn't contain.

Rose blinked.

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End

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