

Day's Wing

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This takes place after Ragnarok (the Norse theory of the end of the world). There's a prophecy around about the Six Wings, who will bring about the downfall of Akugami. There have been many attempts by a few generations and they have ALL FAILED.

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0 - Prologue

Sun looked down from the ledge's top, her outward expression focused and indifferent. The sword she always carried, given to her the night before her parents died, hung in a leather strap around her hips, sheathless; no scabbard had ever encased this broadsword.

At the base of the cliff, a large city rested in the shadow behind the sun, the richer part of the town separated from the poorer by a large wall with several small gates.

Unlike her predecessors, Sun knew exactly what to do. The previous Wings had failed, and now it was her turn to prove that her generation was the best. She took the broadsword out of her belt, but left the small dagger; that, she knew, she was going to need. She uncovered a long, shallow ditch in the ground, placing the sword gently into it. She replaced the cover and renewed the spell over it, in place so no one discovered the weapon by accident.

Then, shouldering a pack of rations, she headed down the mountainside. She looked back at the patch of ground that wasn't exactly ground, and promised - more to herself, "I will return, Hihane."

"Once there was a prophet that foretold the coming of the Six Wings, the chosen ones that will save this world from the evil Kami. After Ragnarok, the Akugami took control of the land, but soon he will be overthrown and no one will hunger, no one will thirst, there will be no poverty and it shall rain again. So mote it be."

Jyra, a twelve-turning-thirteen-tomorrow boy of the village, muttered this to himself, a legend whispered across time and land by dissenters of the so-called God of Fumouzabaku. He carried a parcel with him, full of the groceries that his father had sent him to buy - none that they really needed, and all paid for with Jyra's own wallet.

It never rained in the world anymore, except in far southern places, and the mysterious land across the sea; the land, it was rumored, that had caused Ragnarok in the first place. Rumor had it that most of the people of that land never cared for the things which made them special, and the end of that world wiped away all their mistakes.

Somehow, however, though the precipitation never fell in the north, there was always mud to be found in the streets. These streets started off as just plain dirt roads, but when the nobility had found that they could afford more water than those in the slums, they had begun a trend of sending their servants with a few buckets of water and dumping them in the streets, just to show their disdain of the unfortunate people living there.

Jyra had no family but his usually-drunk father and the cat they'd had for three years. When his father was sober he was nice enough, but most of the time, he sent Jyra off to do some exhausting task while smelling of ale. The nearest shop was almost two hours away walking, and they didn't have a wagon or

a wheelbarrow to carry the groceries in.

Despite all this, Jyra enjoyed his life, knowing he was better off than a lot of people here. Granted, he wasn't the richest in these slums - that was his father, and he kept the money to himself for his alcohol - but he knew money wasn't everything; stories were. A tale was worth a lot these days, especially the ones that spoke of hope, bravery, and dreams for things to change. Every time he thought he heard a legend being repeated, he would stop and listen 'til the end. The local storyteller knew his name and face, and often she would seek him out first if she had a new yarn to spin.

His favorite legend, however, was the one his mother told him while on her deathbed at his fifth birthday. The legend that had been her favorite, as well - the one that his father scorned and laughed at. The tale about the Six Wings and the day they would come together and cleanse the Earth.

Lost in thought, Jyra didn't notice he was on a crash course until he ran into the man in front of him. The parcel split open from the impact and the groceries fell in the mud. The man turned around with an angry look on his face; raising a hand, he backhanded the boy, sending him face-first in the wet ooze.

"Watch where you're going, kid!" the man snapped as he started off again. Then he stopped; a woman of about seventeen stood in his path. Her bright green eyes glinted angrily, and her brown-and-black hair looked a little too clean for her to have come from the slums.

"You are an idiot," she growled fiercely.

"What did you-"

"Can't you see that that was your own fault? Go back and help that boy up."

Baffled by the woman's outright arrogance, unlike any woman that was socially acceptable, the man shouldered her aside and walked away. She grabbed his wrist, and he turned and aimed a punch at her face. She dodged and brought her knee up into his crotch, and as he fell, gasping in pain, she drove the heel of her hand into his face and knocked him out with a hard blow to his jaw with her other hand.

"Oops," she said, "I went a little too far." She turned back to Jyra and held her hand out to help him up. "You okay, kid?" she asked politely.

He reached and grabbed her hand. "Yeah, I'm all right," he answered.

At the contact, the woman started, but her disconcerted expression vanished as soon as it had appeared, and she pulled him to his feet.

"You know, you should be more careful," she said as she bent to help pick up his things. "It may have been mostly his fault, but adults don't care much."

"I know," Jyra answered. "I've lived here my whole life."

"I wonder why you don't die of misery," she muttered.

"Huh?"

"Nothing," she said. She got up and handed him his groceries. "My name's Sun Liebermann. What's yours?"

"Jyra Thomas," he answered.

"Jyra, huh? Odd name for someone from this place."

"I'm not from here," he said. "My father found me when I was a baby, and I had a note attached to my blanket. A nametag...or something like that." He looked up at her and grinned. "I don't care much, really. Stuff like that's not important in a place like this."

"It's more important than you know," Sun murmured, instantaneously serious. She turned and walked away before Jyra could ask about her sudden mood swing.

"Uh...Thanks for helping me!" he called after her. She waved without turning to show she'd heard. Skirting the unconscious man, Jyra continued on his way, pretending not to notice the stares aimed at him.

In another ten minutes he'd reached his home, but from the sounds resonating within, he could tell that his father, Daemon Thomas, was still drunk. He decided to ride out the rest of the man's intoxication in his room - which wasn't a room; Jyra lived in a small, one-room, no-restroom shack on his father's property, where he'd been moved on his tenth birthday on his father's insistence that he was old enough to live on his own.

Rosie meowed welcomingly as Jyra opened the door, and leaped off his bed to purr and rub against his legs. The small gray-and-white cat was the granddaughter of his mother's favorite cat, Artemis, and was about three years old. Jyra had taken it upon himself to protect Rosie from Daemon's violent, alcohol-stimulated tempers, which was how they'd lost Artemis and Gypsy, Rosie's mother. Jyra fed her with some of the meat he'd purchased (which had been protected from the mud by a paper wrapping) and stroked her while she ate.

"Something weird happened today," he said, more to himself. "I don't know exactly how it was weird, but I think it's important."

A pair of bright green eyes glittered in the moonlight...

1 - The Six Wings

Chapter 1: The Six Wings

Jyra woke with a start, and couldn't figure out what had wakened him. Then he heard a pounding on the door, followed by a loud, slurred shout: "Jyra, yew get out 'ere, boy!"

"Coming," Jyra said, getting up to unlock his door. *Oh, great, he still sounds drunk...* As Jyra opened the door, he noticed that Rosie was nowhere to be seen. She must have been frightened by Father's pounding, and ran to hide, he thought.

Daemon's fist narrowly missed Jyra's face, and Jyra jumped back as his father charged into the small shack, filling the doorway.

He never gets this bad, Jyra thought, an instant before a long, thick arm caught him and threw him against the side wall. Stunned, he couldn't move as his father reached down and grabbed him by the throat, lifting him into the air. Jyra struggled for breath, trying to pry the strong hand from his neck. Then he felt a hard object press against his chest, looked down as best he could to see a rifle, held by his father, ready to be fired. He braced himself for the projectile; but instead of the blow hitting his heart, it was pushed aside at the last second and shot through his side instead. He was suddenly released; and as he fell to the ground, he could dimly make out the flash of a silver sword leave Daemon's body as the man collapsed.

After Sun had left Jyra on the street, she had gone back to where she had hidden her blade; she felt that, before the night was out, she would need it. She was half right. It was actually past midnight when a small gray-and-white cat - apparently, Jyra's - came for help, sensing that her master was in trouble. Sun had come back into the town, seeking the place she had fought the man who had knocked Jyra down - the man was gone, but the impression his large body had made was still there, in the mud - and going from there the direction she had seen the boy head. All this took about five hours.

He's just like me, she had realized, when he had told her about his father finding him. *He just doesn't realize the truth behind the lies...*

Sun went out and bought supplies. Her rations were enough to feed just herself for a meal or two, but Jyra would need more than that. He was a growing boy, Sun justified. One meal a day just wouldn't cut it. Because she knew that he would be coming with her when she left this village; at their contact earlier, when she had helped him up, she realized that this was the one she was looking for. It was her duty to find and gather all the Wings together, as the Wing of the Day.

Sun had found her way back to Jyra's house, which she had found when going back earlier, but halfway there she realized that someone was approaching fast from that direction. It was Rosie (but, of course, she didn't know that at the time), and she was trembling. From this Sun gathered Jyra was in danger,

and continued on, but faster, sword ready. She barged into the shack, saw the gun with trigger half-pulled, and charged into Daemon's side full-speed. She wasn't in time; when she heard the gun go off she looked around. Seeing Jyra on the ground, blue-faced, with blood spilling out of a horrendous wound in his side, Sun's protective side got the better of her and she went all-out against Daemon, until the man was nothing but a giant, bloody hunk of Swiss cheese.

Through bleary eyes, Jyra saw a woman approach him and felt a hand on his cheek.

"Oh, God, Jyra, you're so lucky I was here. Hang in there, kiddo." Sun's voice was frantic, but she controlled it as best she could.

"S-Sun?"

"Yeah, it's me. Don't go dying on me just yet; you're needed by many."

"It...hurts..." Jyra's voice seemed so far away now; and if his was distant, then Sun's was light years away. It barely reached him now as he faded away, his vision blurred by pain and the oxygen that had hit his lungs full force after nearly three minutes without it.

"I know it must hurt a lot," Sun murmured. "Just bear it a while longer."

Everything was pain, and the pain was a field of flowers.

Jyra walked slowly through the field, stooping once to touch one of the flowers. Two taller blossoms than the one he was reaching for barely grazed his neck and his side, but when they made contact it burned like fire. The one he'd been about to touch suddenly grinned at him with a mouth full of blade-sharp teeth and bit his hand.

"Don't trust those close to you!" the flower cackled. "They'll either bite you or run away!" At this, the flower grew, gaining familiar human features as it did, until his mother stood before him. She smiled sweetly and turned away, fading into the distance, as does a gull bound for the sea.

"Mother!" Jyra cried, trying to follow. But the flowers around him turned into thorny vines, wrapping around him, holding him down. The thorns dug into his skin until the ground beneath him turned red with his blood. Still he strained toward where his mother disappeared, calling, "Mother! Mother, don't leave me!"

"OI! Stop moving around or you'll hurt yourself worse than you already are!" A stern, annoyed female voice sounded from close by. As Jyra came awake, he became aware not only of the pain in his side and neck, but of his partially-healed broken leg and a faded bruise on his head. He reached for the bruise, eyes still closed, but someone else's hand stilled his own. He opened his eyes to see Sun glaring down at him.

“Are you deaf or stupid? I just told you to keep still!” she growled.

“Su-Sun? What’re you - ”

“Never mind, let’s just say I came in the nick of time. But you still sustained some serious damage; you’ve got some bed rest ahead of you.”

“What happened to Father?”

“He’s dead; I killed him,” Sun said bluntly.

“What?” Jyra exclaimed.

“It was either that or watch you die, which I did NOT intend on doing. I don’t like watching helpless people getting themselves killed, especially when you’re one of the Six.”

“One of...”

“The Six.” Sun looked sidelong at him. “Don’t tell me you don’t know what the Six Wings are?”

“Of course I do,” Jyra answered, remembering his mother’s legend.

“Good, then I don’t have to explain everything to you. It’s a pretty long story as it is.” She took the kettle, which was steaming steadily, from the fire and poured the hot water into a cup. Steam rose from the mug as she blew on it. “Here; sit up while you drink this so you don’t spill it and scald yourself. I’ve had enough panic attacks without you injuring yourself more. And listen while I’m talking; no interruptions.”

As Jyra sipped carefully at the tea, Sun began.

“You probably think that the legend of the Six Wings is just that - a legend - but it’s not. Maybe I’ll prove it to you, but not right now; I don’t exactly want to burn the place down. The legend is called ‘Six Wings’ because wings symbolize freedom, which is what this world desperately needs.

“You were not found by your father. While you were still unconscious I had a little look through that man’s room, and I found the proof of ownership for someone named ‘Jyra Thomas’, signed and sealed. He bought you as an infant and told his wife that he’d found you. I’m almost the same as you; my grandparents bought me as a gift to their daughter and her husband, but the reason for their choice was completely different.

“You see, the government hires people to go undercover and find people suspected of being a Wing. That guy was one of them. The stuffed shirts have heard the legend, too, and they’re afraid we’ll storm them and upturn their well-established ‘peace’ - and they’re not far off the mark.”

“Why didn’t Father - Daemon - kill me right off, then?” Jyra asked.

“Oh, not calling him your father anymore? That’s good.” Sun grinned. “The traits typical of one of us

aren't visible until puberty. You just turned thirteen, no?"

"The day after we met," Jyra answered.

"Well, there you go. Anyway, my grandparents told me that I wasn't born free the night before they...died. I was given Hihane the day before, so when they and my parents died I just left. I met an old woman who told me what I was - what I had been for three years - and what I have to do. She also told me of people who had been the Six Wings in days past..."

She drifted off. Jyra waited.

"What happened to them?" he asked when she didn't go on.

"They all failed. Every one of them; five generations in total. Obviously, or we wouldn't be under the rule of *der Böse Gott*." She spat the words. "But I'm gonna succeed." She said this more quietly. "I'm different from the others; I know I can do this."

She was silent for a long moment. "But I'll need help," she said at last. "One teenage girl's not winning against a man claiming to be a god, no matter how phony he is. The first thing we gotta do is find the other four Wings and establish some kind of relationship; we'll decide what to do next after that."

"We?"

"Of course. You're a Wing, too, remember? You and I are chosen; we have no choice. Not that I resent that. I hate this kind of life and I always have." She looked at him suddenly, concern in her eyes. "How're you feeling, by the way?"

"All right; the tea's helping."

"That's just jasmine. Healthy, but not exactly medicinal." She sighed in relief. "It's good that you're feeling better, though. When I got to you I could barely feel your pulse, and you were bleeding so much you could've swam in it. My knowledge of healing is limited; you were out for five or six days before I could bring your fever down. I was sure most of the time that you were going to die."

"Wait, how long, again?"

"Well, you were delirious for the first day, and then you were still out of it a day after I finally got your temperature down. So, probably about a week. You have a smart cat, by the way. She ran for help before that guy - Daemon, right? - started attacking you."

"How do you know that?" Jyra asked.

"She told me," Sun answered. "Well, not so much 'told' as 'thought'. I have a bit of ESP when it comes to animals, especially cats. Maybe the cat part comes from my being a Leo."

"You're a psychic?"

“Not exactly, more of an animal-whisperer. But that’s not important. What is, is getting you rested up and ready to go as soon as possible. Posthaste. So give me that empty teacup and go back to sleep.” Sun took the cup from him and set it on the nightstand, filling it with cool water rather than jasmine tea. She gave Rosie’s ear a little scratch - Jyra hadn’t noticed her on his pillow - and sat in the chair. She pulled a little book out of a hidden pocket in her cloak, opened it, and began reading to herself. It seemed to Jyra that she was both a little more and a little less at ease than they met the previous week, as if both wary and composed at the same time.

2 - Departure

Three days later Jyra was able to move around freely, and Sun deemed him fit to begin their journey. Limping a very little, Jyra gazed into the room that had been his father's - or, at least, the man who had acted as his father. On the nightstand he found Daemon's wallet, stuffed with money that had never been used. Jyra assumed it was the man's alcohol money, and emptied it into his own wallet. Beside the bed he found a bow and a quiver of arrows. The bow had been carved; some kind of Asian writing had been engraved on it. He picked it up and immediately felt this had been made for him.

Returning to the main room - it was a two-bedroom hut a little bigger than his own shack - he showed Sun the bow and asked about the strange writing.

"It's kanji and katakana," she told him. She showed him the hilt of her sword, which had similar carvings on it. "See, Hihane is the same. The kanji - that's Japanese for Chinese characters - says 'hi hane', or 'day wing'. The katakana - a phonetic alphabet for words foreign to Japan - reads the German word 'sonne'."

"'Sonne'? What does that mean?"

"It's the word for 'sun'. My parents, the ones I remember, lived in Germany. Deutschland ist ausgezeichnet, ja#?" she added with a slightly smug expression.

Jyra gave her a blank look. "Um...what?"

"German. I'll teach you a little, if you want. Now let me see your bow."

He handed it to her, and she examined it a little. "Well, I know what the katakana says - Jyra. I can't read much kanji, though, I only learned enough of it to read the carvings on these weapons. So I know the elements and 'day' and 'night'." She sighed. "This says 'kaze' - 'wind' - but I don't know what the other character says, so we'll have to wait to find out what your bow's name is."

Jyra felt a little disappointed, but Sun grinned and clapped his shoulder. "Oops, sorry," she said as he temporarily lost his balance. "It took me a couple years to figure out any of the writing on Hihane, so you're lucky to know most of it. Don't worry about it. At least you know what element you are. But enough of that for now. Since you found that, I think it's about time we left."

The two left the house, but just as they were about to leave Jyra said, "Wait here." He went to his shack and herded Rosie out of it, then grabbed two things: an empty haversack and the pearl pendant that his mother had given him. He then took a stick from the fire and proceeded to spread the blaze around, and when the walls caught fire he came out, taking the stick with him, held aloft like a torch. Sun watched, virtually expressionless.

"I don't want to have to return here when our journey's over," he explained.

"It may end with our deaths," Sun said quietly.

“Huh?”

“Nothing. Are you sure about this? Once you make this decision, it’s made.”

“I’m sure.” He threw the torch into the front room of Daemon’s hut, and it quickly caught on the mess of torn paper and broken bottles that had previously held alcohol. It spread to the room and up the bed, where under the covers lay a large, bloody figure, which was reduced to ashes by the flames in less than an hour.

“We should head by the shop and grab supplies,” Jyra said.

“I’ve already got food, so we don’t need to worry about that,” Sun answered.

“What we need is a map, maybe a lighter or some matches. I suck at lighting fires without them.”

They reached the shop and explained to the keeper what they needed, and he went into the back room and emerged again with a folded sheet of parchment.

“I’ve had this map in storage for a while,” the shopkeeper said. “It’s rather old and I can’t sell it in this town because it has America on it. Everyone seems to think that even an image of the place will cause another Ragnarok.” He sighed. “This is yours if you have need of it.”

“How much do you want for it?” Jyra asked.

As they haggled the price for the map, Sun looked around (She didn’t like to admit it, but she wasn’t very smart when it came to finances and was happy to leave the bartering to Jyra.). She saw mothers pass with children like toothpicks, men with bruised and beaten wives, and her blood began to boil as she saw a couple of kids tease another, obviously worse off, across the street. Nowhere could be seen anyone over the age of forty. Then she caught sight of a woman in her early fifties coming into the shop, passing Sun to approach Jyra, who had just handed some coins to the shopkeeper and was pocketing the proffered map and an old-looking lighter.

“You leaving, Jyra?” the woman asked.

“Yes, Calliope,” he replied, turning to face her.

“Without saying goodbye, eh?”

“I was going to,” he defended himself. “At least, if I could persuade Sun here to -”

“So you’re the one taking our Jyra away?” Calliope cast a critical eye over Sun, who felt a little self-conscious. “A bit old for you, if you ask me,” she said, turning back to Jyra.

“We’re not eloping,” Sun protested.

“Yeah, we’re going to get the - ow!” He cut off as Sun stomped on his foot.

"It's an important mission," she assured the old woman. "I'll have him back soon, and in one piece."

"I should hope not!" Calliope exclaimed. "His mother and father dead, house burned to the ground, he had good reason not to return!"

"Well, that's...er...I, uh..." Sun stammered uncomfortably.

Calliope laughed. "I always thought Jyra would leave someday," she said. "Here, boy, let me take a look at that bow of yours."

Jyra handed her the weapon, and she examined the kanji on the side. "Just as I thought," she said. "Kazehanashi - tale of the wind." She handed the bow back to Jyra. "I look forward to seeing the result of your 'important mission'. Perhaps, when it's all over, you can come back and relay it to me. I could always use a new story."

The old storyteller clapped Sun's shoulder. "Try the village to the southwest," she advised. "You may find someone of merit there."

As Calliope left the shop, Sun and Jyra stood and stared after her.

"Does she know?" Sun muttered to Jyra.

"Probably," he whispered back. "That's the local storyteller, and everyone thinks she knows more than she lets on."

"Well, then, there's no hurt in following her advise. Guess we're headed southwest."