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[Title]

### **Glossary**

#### **Sami Words**

Elektrici - electricity

Guovssahasat - the aurora borealis; northern lights

Ahhku - grandmother

Noaidi - shaman

Siedis - place of worship

Gákti - traditional Sami dress

Ruoššas - Russians

#### **Mythology**

Lintukoto - the milky way; in Sami myth, the place where the birds migrate to for the winter.

Beaivi - Sami sun goddess

Ukko - Sami thunder god

Sielulintu - a large bird and spirit guide, who would keep noaidi from wandering in dreams.

## Chapter 1



It was that precarious time of year; the sun hung in low in the sky just over the horizon, dancing and throwing off shades of pink and amber, threatening twilight behind every mountain top. Skuas and kites made their path across the sky in what would soon signal the exodus to Lintukoto, the place where the birds dwelt for the long night.

In the base of the mountain pass, Cappaivvaš sparkled with the glow of fires in lanterns that hung from poles scattered between the village homes. The homes, usually the earthy cedar and vibrant green of the summer moss, had been blended over with the recent snowfall. A few homes buzzed with the blue light of the *elektrici*; for most, it was a modern luxury that most had not relented to yet, but the appeal was growing daily as the autumn sky darkened towards winter.

Near the center of town, a girl stood in the crystalline air, gazing up at the flakes of snow as they fell with a sleepy expression. Her fur hood was drawn tight around her short auburn braids, and she stood outside the row of snowy mounds clutching a tin pot with thickly gloved hands. Despite what appeared to be the early light of dawn, it was late morning - she had only been awake for an hour or so, but could already feel the bustling energy of the village rising and working all around her. Down the trodden path, a few of the herders had already set off with wooden skis in hand to tend to their herds of reindeer that waited near the mountains. A few young boys blew past the girl as they trampled back from an early-morning hunt of small game. The houses beside her glowed with the light of the hearth and she could feel her mouth water at the rising smells of smoked meat that came from within.

Motivated by a rumbling stomach, the girl walked over to a freshly fallen pile and bent to scoop the snow into the tin pot, whispering a quiet prayer to the animal who had given her the warmth of her gloves.

A few houses away, a figure appeared in the door frame of the girl's own home, indigo garments a dark shape against the pale pink of the snow. Like the girl, the figure had auburn hair that spiraled down from the ear flaps of her white fur cap; she was a woman with a clever face and a particularly sharp kindness.

“Áire! Breakfast is almost ready!”

Áire stood quickly and placed the lid back over the tin pot. Dusting off the sparkling snow from her blue gákti, she started back towards her home.

Áire's mother, Sonjá, met her at the door and quickly took the pot from her hands. She returned to the hearth at the center of their thatched wooden home, where she busy at work - busy with the multitude of pots and metal racks that were suspended over the crackling fire. She took the ice that Áire had gathered and dumped it carefully into a smaller pot, followed by a thick, dark liquid that smelled strongly of coffee. There was a crackling *hissss* as the snow melted away into a deep, earthy blend.

Áire felt her heart flutter and rise with at thought of warm coffee, and she took a seat next to her father at a wooden table near the side of circular room. He was already pouring over a pile of letters, whistling softly, a quill poised thoughtfully near his temple.

As she sat, he glanced up at her, blue eyes ever inquisitive. “What time does Ahhku want you for lessons this morning?” He reached for the quill behind his ear, but kept his attention on his daughter.

Áire removed the leather gloves from her hands and set out three mugs on the table,

momentarily distracted by her father's song, and only half paying attention to the question. "Uh," she said, blinking and reaching for a stack of plates, "she wants me there before high noon, so we can go over my rites for tomorrow."

Her father nodded, and resumed his work - and with it, his low, soft whistling.

"You know," Áire couldn't help herself; the curiosity bit at the back of her mind. "The other kids says that if you whistle under the aurora, the spirits will come snatch your soul."

Her father didn't look up from his work, but a grin threatened the corner of his mouth as he jotted notes down in a small corner of the page before him. "I think that some people fear what they don't understand," he said simply.

Behind him, Sonjá appeared suddenly with a pot of coffee in hand, nodding at the mug in front of him. "Heikki."

"Oh, yes - thank you, dear," Heikki said, passing her the mug. Sonjá filled it full of steaming coffee and passed it back across the table, planting a gentle kiss on her husband's cheek. Heikki reached for her hand gave it a quick squeeze, blue eyes beaming at Sonjá as she crossed over to fill Áire's mug. Heikki returned to his papers, absentmindedly stirring the coffee with the feathered quill in hand.

Áire grinned up at her mother. *Should I tell him?* her eyes asked.

Sonjá smirked and shook her head, putting a single finger to her lips. She turned back to the hearth with Áire's and Heikki's plates, and grabbed some of the cooked meat off the fire for their breakfast, garnishing it with a collection of berries and some cheese from a basket on the table. Áire could feel her mouth start to water, and she remembered to murmur a prayer of thanks to the god of the hunt. *Spiritual discipline.*

“Heikki,” Sonjá said, setting down two more plates and taking a place between her daughter and husband at the table, “did you want to give Áire her gift today, or wait until after the Awakening?”

Áire glanced from her mother to her father, biting her tongue. She hadn’t been expecting any gift at all. Could it be a new gákti? A sleigh? No, she wasn’t old enough to need her own sleigh. Maybe it would be something for her job as newly christened shaman. Her own drum? She looked at Heikki, who was still stirring his coffee with the ink-end of his quill.

Heikki looked up from the stack of papers, blonde strands falling loose from their tie behind his neck. “Ah, well, I have to give it to her today now that you’ve brought it up.” A smile played across his lips. He glanced down towards his coffee and groaned when he saw the black-soaked quill feather. “Oh, Ukko be damned - ”

Áire stifled a giggle as her father sheepishly wiped off his quill on a nearby scrap of cloth. Without speaking, and with a smile shining in her dark eyes, Sonjá pushed her own mug of coffee towards Heikki, which he took gratefully as he began to cut away at the block of cheese on his plate.

Áire leaned in closer, momentarily forgetting her breakfast. She decided to take a guess. “Is it a book? Please let it be a book.”

Heikki and Sonjá met eyes across the table, and Áire looked at both of her parents expectantly. A book - she couldn’t stop her heart from leaping at the thought. She had already read through all of the texts that Cappaivvaš had to offer, most of which belong to Heikki, and had resorted to borrowing from nearby villages whenever she got the chance, which was not often.

“We’ll show you after your lessons,” Sonjá relented, gesturing Áire’s plate. “But first finish your breakfast, and make sure you take over the basket for Ahhku. You know how much she likes lingonberry jelly.”



The way to Ahhku’s house was not long, though she lived away from the center of Cappaivvaš, in the kind of solitude that came with old age and a fondness for the peace and quiet. Áire made her way out of the village across the packed snow, into trails lined with frosted pine trees and lichen-covered moss. Her mind wandered freely as she walked; she pondered the mystery of her parents’ gift and the upcoming lesson with Ahhku, and whether or not the old shaman would finally tell her how to walk with the spirits like a true *noaidi* once she had completed her spiritual training.

*After all, I’ve been patient so far, Áire thought. And my Awakening begins tomorrow.* She could almost see it - the spirit world glowing, blazing with light like the stars in the night sky. It was an upside down world, she was told - she could feel the vertigo of the world shifting up and around, falling into place with a newfound clarity. There would be flowers, and sunlight, even in the winter. Warm, lasting sunlight. The animals would be wild - even the reindeer would roam like they once did, long ago, across fields and over hills, along with the ancestors who engaged in the eternal hunt. She wondered if she could choose the animal that would serve as her guide, her *gacctit*.

Áire came around a bend, and the slope of the path increased to a gentle climb. The snow here had become slightly less packed; a sign of less travel, though there were two

distinct ruts in the path from the passing of sleds. Stepping into one of the ruts, she continued to follow the path as it rolled back down to the banks of an icy lake.

Ahhku's house was there, by the line of pine trees near the lake shore - and to Áire, it was a welcoming sight. The peat home was simple: it was a warm, lopsided mound lined with timber boughs that ran up the sides to a rounded roof, like most Sami dwellings. A scattered collection of hardy flowers had grown up over the top, surrounding a small vent and a soft, lazy curl of smoke. The door frame jutted out from the side of the mound, and had a simple sign that was dangling above the knob:

*Light Laughs at Deeds of Darkness*

*And Here, There is No Cow on the Ice*

Áire barely noticed the sign at this point, and had long since given up trying to decipher the meaning. She walked up to the door and raised her hand to knock; before she could, however, a voice called from inside.

“No need, dear, just come in.”

Áire felt a grin widen across her face. This was was a custom of their lessons, and as always Ahhku met her with her usual patience and premonition. Still smiling, Áire clutched the lingonberry basket in one hand and used the other to swing open the door to Ahhku's home.

Inside, Áire was met by a wave of familiar smells - spruce and cinnamon, and a distance sweetness like a summer wildflower. Ahhku sat near the center of the dwelling, legs crossed. Her white braids dancing with an orange glow, her eyes attentive to a pot of boiling water over the fire.

“Tea?” She asked.

Áire stepped further into the home, but remained standing until she could give Ahhku the basket that her mother had made up. “Oh,” she said, seeing the water and realizing it was the source of the smells. “No thank you, I’m okay actually - ”

“Cinnamon tea is always good for calming my old bones, I find,” the shaman continued as she gave the tea a stir with her wooden spoon. “I think you’ll enjoy this particular blend.”

Without looking up or waiting for further protest, she procured two mugs - Áire couldn’t see where she had gotten them from, and didn’t get the chance to ask - and poured a mug of steaming amber liquid. *Ah, well*, Áire thought lamely. She knew enough not to offend the older woman in refusing again. If nothing else, Ahhku’s persistence was endearing.

Ahhku placed the mugs on a tray on the ground nearby, between two plush cushions, and Áire took that as her cue.

“I brought a basket,” she began, lifting the basket she had brought so Ahhku could see. “My mother made you lingonberry jam.” Áire reached into the basket and revealed a glass jar filled with a deep crimson jelly.

The old woman looked up at the Áire for the first time, and though her mouth didn’t move, her blue eyes twinkled with a smile. “Tell Sonjá that I thank her. She always knew that lingonberries were my favorite, and Beavi knows I can’t pick them like I used to.”

Áire returned the smile and offered up the basket, to which Ahhku motioned vaguely with her free hand. “Just put that down anywhere, and come sit.” Áire obeyed, and placed the basket to the side of the room near an assortment of other wares, and



returned to take a seat next to Ahhku and the hearth.

Sitting crossed-legged to mimic her teacher, Áire bit her lip, bowing her head in silence to wait for Ahhku to speak. It was in the traditions of her people to show respect to her elders - and, as noaidi, Ahhku commanded the highest level of reverence. Áire knew this and tried, without success, to enforce the custom during her multitude of lessons each week.

But Ahhku was not one for formalities, except in matters of hospitality. She swatted the air with her hand. “Oh please, child, enough of that nonsense - take your tea, so we can go over your rites.”

Áire nodded and obeyed, sipping the tea carefully. It was strong - but Ahhku was right; the cinnamon seemed to fill her body with a welcomed warmth, and she found herself disrobing her outer shawl and boots, finally relaxing.

Ahhku searched a pile of parchment to her right, and removed a chosen paper from the middle of the stack. “So you have been to the siedis before, yes?”

Áire nodded again, but then shook her head quickly. “Yes - ah, well, not in a long while.” She could picture the sacred spot in her mind’s eye - the towering collection of boulders that supported each other in some strange feat of natural geometry. She had been to the spot once before, years ago, and knew she would make much more frequent trips as noaidi. “I know that my father knows the way.”

“Yes, Heikki knows the way,” Ahhku murmured, “I’m surprised he hasn’t taken you recently. Ah, well.” The old shaman took a slow sip from her tea, and carefully rearranged the stack of parchment before her. She looked up from the papers and met Áire’s eyes with a surprising amount of concern in place of her usual mirth; when she

spoke, however, her voice was level. “You are about to take your place as noaidi; as such, you must know the events that will come to pass as part of your Awakening.

You have served under me nearly a year - and of course, will continue to, following your enlightenment. Tomorrow evening, you will follow your father to the siedis where he was also was Awakened.”

Áire felt her heartbeat thrum against her chest in a jolt of surprise. Her father? “I hadn’t realized he had gotten that far in his training,” she admitted to her teacher. “Before he stopped.”

Ahhku gave her a careful nod. “Your father was talented in much the same way you are, child, but the call to service of his people led down a different path.”

Áire nodded, pushing questions about her father to the back of her mind as she tried to bring her focus back to the present; her mind slipped, like it often did, in a fluidity that both terrified her and exhilarated her. All at once she was standing with her father as a child behind great stone slabs, she was watching him place down his drum with a letter addressed to his parents saying his reasons for his decision. She was standing by him at Council, with Sonjá, standing over a cot and saw herself, an infant -

*Focus*, she thought, steeling her mind. She wrenched her attention back to the present, to the small dwelling where she sat near the warmth of the hearth and her teacher.

Ahhku met her eyes, but showed no sign of noticing her momentary lapse in presence. The shaman continued, “For you, tomorrow marks the day that you will learn the most important part of noaidi life - your first walk among the world as One. I know I have told you how noaidi draw their power?”

Áire nodded, grateful for a concrete reality, and a fact she knew. “A noaidi gains

power only through the tacit consensus of their people, and yet they have thereby ultimate power over them,” Aire recited dutifully.

Ahhku beamed, eyes twinkling at her student. “You are right, child; but you know that cannot be all. There is a symbiosis to the duty of the noiaidi: it is our job to better ourselves, for our enlightenment, our connection to our people, will give us ability to serve. It is through this we are bound.

“Upon entering the siedis tomorrow, you will be in isolation for three nights, and you will not be able to contact or return with the village until three nights have passed. There, you will where the marks of our people and take up the song we have practiced. And, Beavi willing, you will find the call of those before you.”

Aire paused to consider Ahhku’s words, hands poised around the cup of tea held in her lap, stomach churning. She didn’t know what she had expected. More instruction, perhaps - or clarification. No villager knew the details of what happened during a noiaidi’s Awakening, and she had been hoping for guidance from the old shaman.

“But once I am at the siedis,” she said, voicing her concerns, “what will happen to me there? With the spirits? Is there a judgement?”

Ahhku reached forward and took Aire’s hand in her own. “An Awakening is unique to the noiaidi. Beyond this, I cannot say.”

Aire felt a bitter taste rise in her mouth. The bubbles of excitement and joy for her Awakening were replaced by a sudden anxiety as the world seemed to slip underneath her. What if the spirits didn’t contact her? Was it possible for a noiaidi to fail?

She tried in vain to take a sip from her tea with her free hand, but thought better of it, and placed the cup back down to the tray. Aire took a breathe to steady herself, and

was grateful for Ahhku's hand in her own.

“You will be fine, Aire,” the old woman said with a smile. “Now, let's go over your songs for tomorrow.”

### **Summaries:**

So I've realized now that I didn't get nearly as far along with this story as I was hoping; by trying to slow down, I realized that I have a lot more I want to tell within the first couple of chapters before I get to more of the action. I also want to apologize for repeating the beginning of the story, because I'm sure you're bored of that by now. I've tried my best to summarize where I think I'm going with the story, so let me know what you think! Also, title suggestions are much appreciated!

### **Sonjá's Gift**

The gift that Áire receives from her parents upon returning to the village is her gaccit; an animal guide that serves to aid her within the physical world. Sonjá is the one who chooses this gift for Áire, and goes out of her way to find a white Reindeer, which is sacred and rare in Sami society.

Following the gift of her animal guide, Áire sets off to the siedis to begin preparations for the long stretch of solitude that will mark her Awakening.

### **The Awakening**

The Awakening will be very similar to the original writing - Áire arrives at the siedis with both of her parents and Mielat, her Reindeer familiar, and says goodbye to them at the entrance to the sacred ground in order to begin the ritual. Unlike the first telling, the Awakening will be more spiritually rigorous; Áire must meditate alone for more than two days before she enters the trance state and is able to interact with the spirits.

### **Celebration**

After the Awakening, Áire comes to in the siedis with Mielat, who helps her back to the village. Though not in full control of her powers, Áire realizes that she is now able to understand Mielat through her thoughts. Back at the village, she is met by her family, Ahhku, and the other villagers, who put on a celebratory feast. Áire is still daunted by the responsibility she now has, but is excited to begin work for her people.

### **Introduction To Rástoš**

At the feast, Áire meets many people from the sister village, Karhula - among them, another young Shaman named Rástoš, who is a year older and farther along in his noaidi training. The narrative switches to follow him as he arrives at the celebration and meets Áire. We learn about his training as a noaidi and how it differs from Áire's, in terms of rigor and focus. Áire followed a more casual training - despite her knowledge of the nuances of noaidi life - with a focus on meditation and nonviolence. Rástoš, however, was trained in a more traditional sense but with an emphasis on his authority and a duty to protect the village.

### **The Visitor**

With tension building along the border of Finland and Russia, the villagers start to hear strange reports of Russian interests in the noaidi. Not a week after the celebration, the village is visited by Gavril Vaselov and a consort of Russian officers, who arrive via iceboat and request to meet with the village council and take a particular interest in Áire. Heikki shows uncharacteristic anger, and a surprising display of magic when Vaselov

refuses to stop his interrogation of Áire and leave their home. Vaselov had been demanding to witness a spiritual rite, but upon seeing the more physical display of power, he is content to leave Cappaivvaš with his newfound knowledge.

### **Life As Noaidi**

Weeks after her Awakening and the visit from Vaselov, Áire begins to adjust to shaman life; she is put to work with Ahhku in the various day-to-day tasks of the noaidi. She learns to embrace the calm of her spiritual power, which makes it easy for her to walk amongst the spirits and communicate with a variety of lower deities and ancestors.

### **Rástoš's Walk (Bird Battle)**

Back at Karhula, Rástoš is set to begin his first walk with the spirits. We follow his journey from his village to the frozen lake, where he begins his meditation, and what follows is the previous chapter with the battle between the spirit birds.

### **Burning Villages / Abduction**

Rástoš awakens from his spirit walk to the world around him burning; the forest and houses of his village are all ablaze, and Russian soldiers are raiding through his village, looking for both the elder shaman and more importantly, Rástoš himself. He is quickly captured, and before being brought to Moscow, he is forced to witness the death of his family.

Meanwhile, Áire sets off to the siedis in order to perform a walk and ask the spirits for healing for a few villagers that have contracted whooping cough. While she is away, the Russian raid finds her along the trail, and a battle ensues. She is also taken along with Rástoš to Moscow.

### **Moscow / Rástoš**

Once in Moscow, the two noaidi are confined in separate cells and questioned about the nature of the spirit world and the power they hold. Vaselov comes to question Áire and demands that she demonstrate the same control of the aurora Heikki exhibited, but Áire is unable to control the lights on demand.

Rástoš, however, shows promise for the militarized spirit power, but refuses to cooperate with the Russians and is consequently punished.

During the internment, Áire contracts whooping cough, which leads to voice paralysis. She is terrified to realize that she is losing her ability to speak for long periods of time, and therefore her ability to reach the spirits through song.

Once Vaselov realizes that Áire can no longer use her spiritual powers, she is brought out into the wilderness to the north of the city and is left there to die.

Mielat finds her asleep in the snow and half frozen, and is able to carry her as far as a nearby town in the outskirts of Moscow.

Somehow, she eventually finds herself in Helsinki, where she meets a Danish soldier, named Jakob Iverson, who is way into Jazz music / singing and really not cut out to be fighting a war. He and Áire become friends and he begins to help her learn how to whistle, and then train her voice back to full use.

[Here's where my planning has failed me - I'm not sure where the story goes after this, but I'm open to suggestions!]

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