

November 3

This is almost impossible to write. Visit from Queen Camellia today - oh, what a visit.

She brought tea and laid it out methodically, just as careful as she is with everything she does. Until we were halfway through our cups she kept silent on why she'd chosen to visit me, only smiling and asking me about myself. I knew she would not reach the point before she was ready, so I waited. And then - and then!



She said that she wanted me to be her successor. Me! The next Queen!

I can hardly describe how I felt. Shock, first, then joy and elation, pride and a touch of fear. Even now I am still a little unsure. Am I really suited for such a role? But then again, perhaps the surge of love and pride I feel ensures I will rise to whatever challenge is necessary and become a good Queen. Good is all I can hope to be when I imagine myself crowned.

I asked Camellia if there has ever been a human Queen before, and she said not to her knowledge. Then I asked if Juniper or Sorrel had put her up to this as a joke, and she laughed, quiet and controlled, and said of course they didn't, but that an abundance of love for me had drawn her attention. Then she told me that she would be visiting me regularly to teach me everything that a Queen needs to know.

I didn't know before today that the Queens have their own language, spoken by neither the Summer or Winter Courts. Camellia told me that she keeps all her journals in this language, but of course I am not expected to do that yet seeing as I do not speak it. However, as it is important to get in the habit I will transcribe here the phrases she taught me today. I have never had a mind for foreign languages, so I expect Camellia has her work cut out for her in teaching me. But I want this more than I can imagine wanting anything else in the universe. I will learn, whatever it takes.

The trees are a forest: pai tom itlepeyim om itlekak.



I will not craft a necklace before the celebration: ikrishayit rem o kaklu ipra tom yenyamin.

The bird rules the trees: ayishen tom mirmir tom yitlepeyim.

The sword shines with fire: rikeshen tom klaga oto ika gol.

I will tend the birds and the forest's trees: peyashiyan rem tom imirmirim plu tom yitlepeyim anitlekak.

Afterwards I ran straight to Sorrel to tell them what had happened. I could see the joy shining in their eyes as they nodded along, always happy to listen intently to anything involving newfound knowledge.

November 20

How I love sitting and writing under my big oak. It is true what Camellia says. ayishone tom itlepe tom yitlekak: "The tree ruled the forest."

Today Sorrel managed to get their hands on all these lovely little bits of metal and clockwork. I, having previously said I was bored, was told in no uncertain terms that I was to learn to create tiny metal contraptions.

Thus held prisoner by my oh-so-cruel love's words, I gladly took on the task which I'd been set.

Sorrel walked me through creating a little metal beetle which, imbued with a spark of faerie magic, scuttles endlessly over tree stumps after being wound up. Then they bade me work alone to create a surprise for them. I found it quite difficult at first, but quickly warmed up to the process of fitting gears together and shaping metal.



We worked through the afternoon and into the night, Sorrel refusing to show me what they were working on even when I pried. Once I tried to peek and quickly found myself wrapped in Sorrel's arms and facing the other way. First compelled to work and then imprisoned - what a



trying day for poor little me. How good that I have Sorrel beside me for comfort. If only Wisteria were here as well.

I made for Sorrel a little metal robin which flaps its wings and sings a quiet melody. The latter was my own invention, and Sorrel told me I was the cleverest of all. I almost believed it until they showed



me what they'd made: a cunningly curled silver iris, which at first didn't appear to do anything, but when I raised it to my nose to smell it began to tick and unfolded itself, spiralling into tiny pieces and climbing my face until it settled on my brow, now a multitude of small flowers in the form of a crown. I couldn't say anything then, so I just looked at Sorrel in the moonlight, the one who, today, was the first to make me feel truly like a Queen.

Perhaps one day I will be as clever with my hands as Sorrel. ikrishiyān rem o yaya. oto ifrupeyim, ikrishiyān rem iki. epiya ki om aya gya. rankoshiyan tom aya oto tom ifeya nalutri. "I will craft a crown. With flowers, I will craft it. It will be a great crown. The crown will sparkle with the moon's grace."

December 12

It is so odd being the Queen's successor. Fae I don't know have begun to approach me, introducing themselves, plying me with cunning tales or clever gifts, congratulating me or ingratiating themselves. I adore them all, of course, but it does get tiring. Most of them are unwilling to tell me anything that I actually need to know, preferring instead to flatter me with platitudes or boast of their own intelligence. Meanwhile I sit whiling away my days with Sorrel as the coronation ticks closer and I still know nearly nothing of what it will mean to be Queen.





Nearly, though; not nothing at all. Once a little faerie I know as Fern bounced up to me as I was gathering mushrooms near the crooked oak. Queen Iris, he said, his voice trembling - they already refer to me as Queen more often than not. He said that he was just waiting for the day

he saw me crowned with the Queen's Soul in my hand, and that it would be the most exciting day of his life to begin to serve someone so capable. Baseless flattery aside, I was curious about the Queen's Soul. Fern explained to me that the Soul is an item I will be granted at the time of the coronation and that in order to keep it I must be approved of by all the Sage Court. How I hope that they will allow me to serve them! Perhaps they will think of me as a majestic Queen, or perhaps they will think simply: nazhonashonit tom fei tom yelar. "The person did not dishonor the Court."



I spent hours today puzzling out a riddle that Wren shared with me, and I think I've stumbled upon the answer. I must ask Sorrel if they think I am correct.

December 24

Finally another visit from Camellia. It seems that a Queen has a lot of responsibility - well, that should be obvious, but it was harder to imagine exactly what I would have to do before I heard it from her directly. I once expressed my doubt in myself, but she said simply: azhonashone tom ayafei irem; azhonashiyan rem imani. "The queen honoured me; I will honour you."

She told me that a Queen's term lasts one hundred years and that for that entire span of time she must be wholly dedicated to her people. A Queen's word has influence on everything from the politics of the Court to the way the moss grows on a tree stump. While teaching me all this she slipped from time to time into the royal tongue, which I am beginning to understand. She gave me three rules which I will continue to think on:



If you think only of your legacy, you dishonour your people.

If you rule unbendingly, you rule as a tyrant.

And a third one, more lighthearted: The queen rules the people, who rule the birds. (In the Queen's tongue: *ayishen tom ayafei tom ifeiyim, inis ayishen tom imirmirim.*)

Of course I do not want to be a tyrant, but the first rule gives me pause. It will be hard to give myself to the people in such a selfless way that I do not even think of what they think of me. They love me now, but perhaps that love will fade, and if it does I must carry on without it. Even if it is hard for me I must use my love as a motivation to learn everything I need to learn and fulfil my responsibilities. Legacy - it will come whether or not I think of it. The flower is the seed's legacy, or as a Queen would say, *pai tom frupe yeklo tom napelin.*

She also introduced me to a bit of what will happen at my coronation. First, I will have to extract several objects from the places Camellia has hidden them, proving my cleverness sufficient for the role of Queen. I will have to assemble a sort of lock in order to get to them. To summon the Queen's Soul and its hiding place - she described it as a glowing sphere - I must say these words in the Queen's tongue: "I am queen and I will rule. The soul shines like the moon. With it, I will not dishonour the queens who ruled before me."

The last thing Camellia told me was this: "*brendi tom ayafei yaltuni igya.*" ("The queen has great cleverness.")

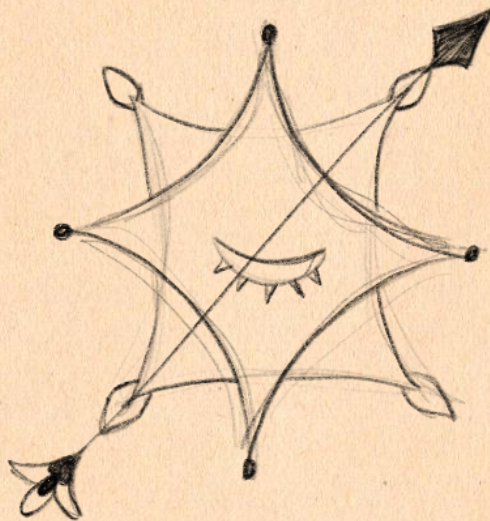
After all this, despite my doubts, I am yet more excited to be Queen.

January 3

Letter from Wisteria today. My heart is full. Sometimes I miss her so, but I must remember: I am completed by the two halves of each year. *pai tom zhamanehen tom sazh plu tom fizhef. etutna rikeshen rayun rikeshen tom sazh. etutna rankoshen feya rankoshen tom fizhef.* "The song is the winter



and the summer. The winter shines like wisdom. The summer sparkles like  
grace."





To the most beautiful (his) of the forest:

Today I stumbled upon two lichens growing up a tree, one twisting up the north side and the other gently climbing on the west. The northern lichen was a beautiful pastel shade of green; while the western was a dusty white, as if of snow - at least now I remember it from last I saw snow in the mortal world. Near the top they flowed into one another and became one. The patterns they made were lovely little curls and spirals of two colors. It was so beautiful that it took my breath away, and I wished you were there to see it with me, my love. I would gladly trade it for having you by my side - but, oh, how much fun you and Sorrel must be having!

I keep the drawing you made of yourself with me always. When I see it, I remember your beauty, your all-encompassing grace, and the way your eyes sparkle when you look at me.

Do you remember Willow? Only yesterday he slighted Amaranthe by refusing their gift of thirteen feathers. And you know what that means for Amaranthe. Things are beginning to heat up! I heard that Amaranthe has a plan to upstage Willow at the next ball, but you didn't hear it from me!

Juniper sends his regards. They miss you as well. We all do.

Remember that I love you,

Wisteria



January 27

Basalt's nickname does not suit him at all. He is a little spritely thing full of energy and vigour, not at all in possession of the slow measured wisdom that one would expect from a Basalt. I had the chance to observe this quite closely today. We happened to try to pick the same mushroom from under my oak tree simultaneously - a situation I suspect he engineered - and he subsequently challenged me to a battle of wits over ownership of the tiny bit of fungus. Of course I agreed. How could I not?

He began with the easy one about the river: "What can run but never walks," &c., &c. Of course I had heard that one before, so I answered it right then and there. He beamed up at me. Such un-competitive behaviour - how sweet of him. Then I asked him the one about the sun, which he also knew in an instant. This went on for a while, so much so that I cannot remember all he asked me, but even when I did not know at once I was able to puzzle it out after a few moments' careful thought.



Finally I thought to use a riddle I had gotten not from Sorrel or another Sage Court companion, but from my own mother. I taught it to my son once he was old enough to speak. (Oh, my Alexander. Sometimes I wonder how old he is now, but of course there is no way for me to know. Sometimes I think: *pai tom etin peyashon anosodel*. "The soul is grief's garden.") The riddle, however, is simple: I am full of keys, but none can open a lock. What am I?

The answer is piano, something with which Basalt was not at all familiar, young as he is. He thought and thought, but could not wrap his mind around it. So the mushroom fell to me, but he looked so downcast that I picked him another just to see him smile. Then he bade me goodbye. He startled me by calling me Queen.



Just as I began to finish this entry I saw a little swallow hopping about on a branch. It has captured my heart entirely. (Poor Sorrel and Wisteria, no longer first in my heart.) As Queen, peyashiyan rem tom imirmirim, inis ayishen tom yitlepeyim. "I will tend the birds, who rule the trees."



February 13

I am already falling asleep. This entry will be short.

Today I pointed out a frozen pond to Sorrel and mentioned that I used to go ice skating. To my surprise, they had never heard of such a thing, but they were quite intrigued when I explained the competitive aspects of figure skating and hockey. Of course I was never an athlete, but I enjoyed imagining myself as a graceful beauty as I glided, quite awkwardly, across the ice. I thought Sorrel had thoroughly put it out of mind until this evening, when they showed up unexpectedly at my sleeping place with a pair of shiny blades in hand. Evidently they had made the skates themselves.

We traipsed over to the lake in the moonlight, me chattering excitedly as Sorrel nodded and smiled. When we had gotten there and strapped the skates to our shoes, I barely remembered how to start moving - but Sorrel, oh, Sorrel! I have never seen them so ungainly. They fell the instant their feet touched the ice, fell again as I pulled them to standing, and only after half an hour's work managed to establish a gait that kept them upright the majority of the time. We had to cross the ice mitten in



hand. How charming it was to see them as such a novice. How charming they found it to be bested at something.

Winter is almost over. The thought is bitter, yet sweet. I thought that summer was the most beautiful season, but now I know: rankoshen tom sazh oto ilemizhef. brendi tom lutri irayun igya. "The winter sparkles with color. The moon has great wisdom."

Sorrel is calling me to sleep beside them now. I must go.

