

Far-Flung

Duke awoke to the sound of waves and an ukulele playing mellow tunes. Warm sand slid about beneath his body. Vibrant sunlight engulfed him like a warm blanket. He laid there with his eyes shut for a long time, trying to remember what it was that left him feeling so uneasy.

Eventually, he opened his eyes to search for the source of the music. The bright light nearly blinded him at first, and soon his gaze met a young man with red hair sitting under a nearby palm tree, wearing a sky blue pair of swimming trunks.

“Duke!” He shouted and smiled, “Dreaming again?”

Slowly, like a picture coming into focus, the name Gregory formed in Duke’s mind, “Yeah. Sorry,” He hesitated, “It was just so real. Felt like a lifetime.”

“Good sleep will do that to ya. I was about to wake you up before you got roasted sleeping in the sun like that. Let’s get back to my place. My mom is making mahi. It will be good after a long day like this one.”

The two boys strolled along in the sand between the waters and a tall stoney cliff until they reached a small set of wooden steps leading up to a wide dock. Gregory climbed ahead of Duke onto the island where their bare feet met with the soft grass. From there they continued through palm trees and brush until they came to a stilted bamboo house, overlooking the dock and the vast, blue ocean. Inside, Gregory’s parents were setting the table for dinner. His mother wrapped her arms around them both, and she kissed her son on the cheek.

“My boys!” Said the plump woman with fiery red hair, “I am so glad you’re here Duke. You know, my daughter has just flown back from the continent,” She stepped back toward the dinner table as she continued talking, “She will be arriving during dinner time.”

Images of a beautiful blonde girl flashed through his mind. A young woman who was confident, measured, and gentle. Moments formed. Reminders of their past. The two of them, growing together. Standing together on the dock at sunset. She kissed him before she left.

“Right, Misty,” Replied Duke.

Greggory punched Duke’s shoulder playfully, “No reason to act shy now,” He chuckled, “Two months is a long time not to see someone of course. Maybe she found a new boyfriend in the big city,” He teased in a playful tone.

Greggory’s father sighed from his seat at the table, staring into his plate. He was a stocky man, bald with a thick black mustache.

“George,” Laughed Greggory’s mother as she served her husband a large slab of fish, “She is a full grown woman and he is a good young man. She could do worse.”

“Glenda, please just leave me be,” Replied George in a stressed tone.

Duke was beginning to feel uncomfortable. Greggory noticed and changed the subject, “Did you catch a lot today dad?” He interjected, and took a seat at the table.

“I caught what is on your plate and another week’s worth,” Replied George.

Duke awkwardly took a seat next to Greggory. Glowing orange sunlight shone through the bay windows of the house. Seagulls mewed outside as the rhythmic crashing of waves created a harmonic tone that calmed Duke’s soul. Greggory’s family laughed together about memories of days passed. Though it was heartwarming, the memories felt different to Duke. They would only return to him as they were spoken of. As if spoken into existence by their words. Nothing original came from his own mind, yet the visions were so clear. Meals shared, games played, sports, schooling, and family. Glenda played some music over a small speaker on the kitchen counter behind them. Beabadoodee’s “Beaches” added to the feeling of relaxation.

Even still, Duke felt like there was something wrong. As if he was being lulled.

“Hello?” A voice called out from the front door on the porch behind them.

Greggory jumped up, and Duke turned to see the source of the familiar voice. Misty stood in the doorway wearing a black pantsuit, holding the handle of a large pink luggage. She looked at him briefly before turning to continue greeting her family. Her father gave her a big, warm hug, “I missed you honeybee,” He said.

Suddenly, Duke’s memories all felt so gray. Something was missing. He wondered about his own family. A sense of longing washed over him.

“Well don’t look so happy to see me,” Said Misty, approaching him.

He snapped to attention, “No, sorry. It’s just so good to see you,” He leaned in for a hug and she reciprocated.

“I missed you,” She squeezed him tight.

A tear rolled down his face, “Yeah, you too.”

He began to pull away but she pulled him in tighter to whisper in his ear, “Stay calm, something is wrong.

Sophia held Isaac’s hand tightly as they walked the quiet neighborhood streets. With his other hand he rolled his bike alongside them. Lucas appeared to be in a trance as he processed the night’s events. Their path was lit by a line of streetlights. The night was warm so it felt as though they were floating along. An occasional breeze went by, filling their nostrils with rich air. Still, a feeling of grief was hanging over Sophia. Duke was missing. Taken by some otherworldly monster. The feeling was faint but she could still sense him in the distance.

“Are you okay?” Asked Isaac.

She looked at him. There was dried blood on his forehead, and he was limping slightly, “I should be asking you that,” She replied plainly.

“Oh this is just a scratch,” He pointed at his head, “I’m perfectly fine. Still have a skip in my step!” He said, exaggerating his steps a little before wincing.

Lucas rolled his eyes, “You’re being goofy,” He said to Isaac.

Amael, who had been ambling ahead of them, came to a stop, “Children, I sense danger,” He said.

The group stopped, already exhausted and unsure of themselves. Isaac, despite his convincing performance, could hardly hold himself up, much less sense the presence of anything sinister. Sophia was the first to notice anything. A pulse, rhythmic and steady. A quiet, funky bass riff broken through the silence of the night, and from the shadows stepped a lanky man with pale skin and slicked back black hair. On the belt loop of his jeans hung a small speaker. Each of his steps appeared in time with the sound of “Better” by Cody Fry, Cory Wong, and Dynamo, “Whatchu kids doin’ here?” He said as he stopped and began to sway in place under a street light. His face was long with a bushy mustache and large, circular sunglasses covered his eyes, “You don’t seem to fit. Don’t you like my funk? Come on and dance with me!” His arms swung back and forth at his sides.

“Children, do not trust this man. He means you harm,” Spoke Amael in a foreboding tone.

The music stopped for a moment, and so did the man. For just that moment he remained frozen in time. Then, Sam Gellaitry’s “Assumptions” slowly faded in, and he came back to life. His arms lowered to his sides as he stared down the children. The music rose until it reached a climactic beat, and he lunged forward, throwing out a powerful side kick at Lucas.

The boy stood there, too afraid to move. Amael leapt like a flash of lightning, catching the heel of the man's boot with his paws. He rolled sideways in the air. The man's foot followed until his body flipped over as well. He fell sideways and cracked his head on the pavement. The large sunglasses fell off to reveal eyes that were completely black.

The man grunted in anger and spun on his back, sending a flurry of kicks all around him. Amael leapt off of his foot into the air above him. The man then sprung from his back and faced the children, head bobbing side to side in rhythm with the song, "Can't you hear?"

Before he could continue his statement, Amael landed on Lucas' head and launched forward again. He crashed into the man's chest. The man coughed and heaved, stumbling backwards until he fell onto his back. A small white speck floated up out of his gaping mouth and shattered, then disappeared. The music stopped.

The children nervously looked at one another and collectively approached his body. Amael stood up on the stranger's belly, licking the back of his paw, "He is fine," That is when the children heard a loud snore come from him, "The evil has been exorcized from his body. He is now resting peacefully."

Sophia raised her hand hesitantly.

"Yes, Sophia?" Amael said with a little head tilt.

"What's going on?" She said gingerly, "This is very confusing."

"Ah, I see. You wish for me to explain the situation you all have found yourselves in."

The children all nodded emphatically.

"This man, like many humans currently, has been infected by agents of the dissonance. They are invaders from my dimension. They have betrayed my king and started to lose ground with the war in our universe. Now they have come to this dimension to claim new territory. They

will send enemies, such as those from Thrawn who you faced earlier. The Thrawn themselves fled their home planet, which has been ravaged by war. The agent of the dissonance tricked them to come in order to sow the seeds of war. Though the Thrawn do not want war any longer.”

“They could have fooled me,” Isaac said as he touched the wound on his head.

“They believed they were under attack and promptly fled. Now that they fear for their lives on this planet, they may become volatile. This is most definitely the scheme of the Dissonance.”

Isaac raised his hand, “Amael, right?” He Asked.

“Yes, but you don’t need to raise your hand,” The cat responded.

“I heard a voice. More than once. I think it saved us,” Replied Isaac unconfidently.

“That would be my king. Before I arrived with others like me, he himself sought out willing individuals to fight the evil from our dimension. His powers have been imbued with your soul. They are gifts that will be a great help to you.”

Lucas slowly raised his hand.

“Please don’t raise your hand,” Said Amael.

“I saw the things you did before. Will we be able to do stuff like that?”

“Well, in a way-”

The man beneath Amael began to grunt and stir in his sleep.

Amael’s eyes grew wide, “Perhaps now is not the best time and place. Come children, I will explain more with time,” He hopped off the man and the group all ran away down the street.