

## The Kira Anthology

*Solo stories, little moments, and all her highs and lows.*

*A great first-stop for seeing Kira under the hood and to meet major characters.*

### Day in the Life of a South Warder

*Thud!*

*“Owwhhhh...”*

Kira had, somehow, miraculously, yet again found the one possible way for her to fall out of bed. How could she keep this up so consistently? What curse could compel her slumbering spirit each morning to tumble and roll such that she stumbled and rumbled onto the floor? Maybe, just this time, her body was onto something. She saw the sun coming up outside. “Fuck! I’m gonna be late!!”

Kira wasted no time. She could sort her hair, makeup, breakfast all out at work in the bathroom (though maybe not that last bit), she staggered out the door and waved Wren goodbye and knew she had to make this one quick.

Thankfully Kira knew all the best shortcuts in town.

She and Wren lived on the street corner right by a wall, and Adrienne’s Tailors which she worked at was over on the other side of the wall by the canal. She could tunnel through it but that would leave too much mess, and going under would get her hair even dirtier than it was. Only one choice left, then!

Kira got outside and quickly adjusted her angle, not by any means of accurate measurement but purely on vibes. She knew this city like the back of her hand, and there was no time to fuck around!

Kira lifted both her arms up, raised one leg, and stomped the ground.

Underneath her the earth bulged and bent, stretched inwards, pulled her back, and then within a second sprung her back out like a slingshot into the air!

Kira soared over the rooftops as if she belonged up there, and not completely at gravity’s mercy. Because of course, at some point she’d have to land.

She *had* planned how to land, right?

Kira waved her arms, trying to stabilise, flailing wildly. She was sure the gulls perched on the wall were cackling at her when they saw her go past. *“Stupid bitch can’t even fly properly!”*

There was no time to think, any wrong move and she’d end up a Kirapancake on the side of the street! She swirled her hands over her landing zone, grinding sand from stone in a pit just deep enough to...

*Pwoofh!*

Kira landed face first, but no broken bones. Broken pride though, maybe. She saw a shadow pass over the morning sun.

“Having fun there?”

Kira looked up and spat grains from her tongue. “Yeah. Tons.”

She saw the haughty figure from the knees up. Olivia Elmston; or Liv to all her friends. The woman was stunning, immaculate. It drove jealousy deep into everyone who looked at her. Today she wore her uniform with particular style, a designer tote wrapped over her shoulder that perfectly matched the formal blacks they were expected to wear. Kira was reminded why they were friends when Liv dared the treacherous sandpool to help heave Kira out, and smiled as they reached eye height. Kira remembered keenly as she walked off that, of course, *they were better off as friends*.

Adrienne's Tailors was exactly as it sounded. She, Liv, and a number other women of various ages had been hired by Adrienne as her tailors. They took orders from a good quarter of the city from taking up clothes too large to mending delicate garments. Adrienne was an affluent businesswoman and working for her was a luxury on its own, with pay better than much of what Old Town offered and reasonable benefits too.

Adrienne was an Old Town native, and though she might get more business working in the Trade District or out of the Blue Quarter or even for the church she had a dream.

To support the people who made her. South Ward was her home, and Adrienne hoped she could make all their lives better.

But she wasn't the only one with a dream, not the only one who wanted to give back to this community. Kira wondered if it was the day to make that dream a reality.

Adrienne, the tall woman with impeccable hair drawn back into a long straight line, measured Kira as she came in. "You look like a mess."

"Yeah. Sorry! Had some trouble getting in."

Her magical ability was no secret. Kira could hardly keep it if it was. Adrienne measured the amount of dust on Kira's uniform and surmised what had happened and said "Clean yourself up before starting. You'll get dirt all over the work pieces."

She nodded with vigor. "On it. Sorry again!"

Kira went outside to stomp the dust clean off her in one motion and went straight for the back room.

"This is the last time, Kira."

Kira swivelled back just to reply. "Understood, ma'am!"

Despite her unprofessionalism, Kira was well worth keeping around.

She had a precision with her needle that few of the other tailors in the shop did, and she could stitch up a severed seam quicker than anyone else. Kira took out her own custom sewing kit with a sharp obsidian needle before looping through a length of silken thread from a skein and got to work on the first piece. This was a beautiful dress, the sort you'd wear at an autumn party when you wanted to impress everyone there and more. The client would probably pay a good sum for doing this well and clearly Adrienne trusted Kira the most by handing it to her. Liv watched from the workstation next to her as Kira flicked her finger to control the volcanic glass needle deftly through the torn lining and drew it back together without even a mark left.

As always, Kira and Liv ended up yapping just as much as working... nothing too interesting, except for one question.

"You hear the explosion last night?" Liv asked Kira, as if she'd know.

"Uhh... no? Sounds pretty normal for Stormwind, usually that or gunshots or someone screaming that they've been murdered."

"I don't even know why I'd ask! You sleep like an actual rock. It was about past midnight. Saw fire coming from nearer the centre of town."

Kira shrugged. "Sounds like Wren?"

"That would be the fourth stronghold she's raided this month though. You think something's going on?"

Kira shrugged, but Liv knew better. "You KNOW something's going on."

"Another gang... New Syndicate they're called. Literally the exact same as all the others though. Nothing to worry about, Wren's handling it!"

Liv pursed her lips. "I hope she can handle it."

"She always has. Anyway..." Kira changed the subject to something fun. "We still on for tonight?"

Liv snorted. "We're *a*lways on... it's you that's been ditching us recently. Heard you found a new friend..."

That was the thing about living in a small town. Word got quick. Kira immediately blushed, a visage entering her mind, spotless skin and amber eyes piercing into her soul, the curl of her lips into each and every word, the ruffle and bounce of her hair.

Liv snapped her fingers. "Kira. Kira! Stay with me. Who's your new bestie? Almost think you're replacing me..."

Kira folded a few strands of hair behind her ear. "She's called Rosie and... maybe you can meet her sometime?"

Liv pursed her lips. "Rosie, huh? Cute name."

"Yeah. She's pretty cute."

"Hm."

Liv worked quietly until lunchtime, without a single further word.

Anyone who lives in South Ward would tell you that the two best parts were the food market and the nightlife. Wren had actually started the food market, years ago, with just one burrito stand that she would set up on the canal's edge... or so Kira had been told. It was a way she could afford to pay for raising her and also to make sure all the other neighbourhood kids ate for free. Eventually word of mouth got out and other food carts came about and set up on the same spot, all exactly on the dot of midday. When even Northwarders started coming, they knew it was a success. Wren wasn't part of it anymore but the market kept going and it was here that Kira and Liv picked up lunch.

Kira pulled out her sketchbook as she mowed through a bowl of curry, a treat she afforded herself more because she was feeling good about herself than what she might usually buy, and Liv peered over her shoulder. Kira's pages showed her new project. Four designer jackets that would fit the new season and it was one for each element. Earth was darker colours, muted and rugged. Fire was bright, colourful, and warm. Air held dancing patterns that swirled along the sleeves and water had trimmings of fur and the cooler colours made it perfect for cold nights

"You realise Adrienne has no interest in branching out, right? She has enough on her hands with us."

Kira grinned. "She'll have no interest until she sees this."

The day dragged on, long and droning, especially with Kira deciding to stay an extra hour both to grease the wheel and to find a time she could get Adrienne alone. It was dark outside by the time Kira knocked on the door of her boss' office.

"Kira. Are you going home?"

"I am. But... I wanted to ask you something."

"My door is open. Come in."

Kira sat down clutching her sketchbook. Adrienne carried on tapping away at what Kira believed to be a typewriter. This miraculous invention let you write with fingers alone...and the fact she had one at all was a status symbol all by itself.

*Tap tap tap tap tap tap.*

*Whirrr.*

*Clunk.*

Adrienne looked back at Kira in short peeks between her typing. Kira suspected it was some accounting records by the number of numbers being punched in.

"Go on. What was it?" Adrienne asked.

"No, don't let me bother you! Finish what you're typing."

"You'll be here until midnight if I do."

Kira pursed her lips and put her sketchbook on the table, closed.

"So you know what we talked about last time?"

"Vaguely."

"You said that... you'd review some of the designs I made!"

"Did I?" Adrienne adjusted her glasses, looked at the sketchbook cover, then back to typing.

*Taptaptaptaptaptittytap.*

*Whirrrr.*

*Clunk!*

"I suppose I did. Go on."

She wasn't looking. Of course, Adrienne was... too busy for that. But Kira opened the pages anyway.

"So I've been thinking... and, I wanted to do... well I wanted to start with something small. Achievable." Kira was already minimizing her work to maximise her chances, basically begging for Adrienne to recognise that she knew how little chance there was for this to happen but to still hope it could, to show Adrienne she recognised that she knew how this business worked... to show her that she, too, was not just a dreamer. She had a plan.

"And I've come up with this idea called Elements... a range of four different styles built off the same base. It's a flight jacket but it's got different colours, materials used-

*Taptaptaptaptap.*

"And, Earth will be these rugged, natural colours, made of a strong leather which I think people will-" Kira flipped to her sketchbook to show it, but still, *taptaptap*. Adrienne didn't even look? *Taptaptap*. "Then uhm... there's fire, water, and air too. But... you can see the designs I sketched."

Kira pushed it forwards. The graphite used in the drawings rattled as Kira subconsciously breathed through it, blurring her designs, until she managed to straighten them back up again.

Finally. Adrienne lifted her fingers from the typewriter and looked at her designs.

Please. Please. Please. Please. Please!

Adrienne's face was always stoic. But she could tell when she was not inspired.

"You have put a lot of effort in." She recognised, but Kira's heart sank when she pushed the sketchbook back, not even flipping the page to see Water and Air.

"But it is not the right time."

"Right." Kira nodded, already staring past her. "I get that." She nodded along. Smiling faintly, the breath taken from her lungs, heartbeat weak, her fingertips going numb.

"It's not to say they're not good. But... maybe..."

What's the word...

Hmm...

Ah.

Right.

Yes.

Please don't take this the wrong way.

It's just that they're...

Derivative?"

Kira barely heard the rest about how she loved Kira's results, how she was their best tailor, how she needed her in that role and would never find a replacement.

Imagine living your whole fucking life sewing shit together that other people made.

Adrienne didn't deserve her bad mood. Kira took the sketchbook when all was said and done and fucking buried it under three meters of dirt.

A stone elevator carried her to the top of the wall overlooking the city. Night had crawled overhead. She saw lights, heard music, the clinking of bottles.

"Kira! Finally got here... only an hour late."

This was their favourite spot. Hers and Liv's. Well. It used to be just theirs, and then Merrick came along. Merrick was fine, by Kira's guess. He was okay. She didn't know him that well... but she couldn't shake this awful, awful vibe from him. And he stank.

They had set up lawn chairs here on the battlements that guards no longer patrolled, Kira grabbed a bottle, Merrick played his guitar, Liv sung with mellow lyrics...

Kira slowly swayed, and watched the silhouettes of those two lean in and kiss each other.

She took a swig, and it tasted like vomit.

## Sunshine and Rainbows

Kira reckoned that, if she moved real quiet and real slow, that her Big Sis wouldn't notice her sliding out the door late on a Thursday evening. She peeped through her open door and saw the coast was clear. The short hallway connected the three rooms of their house; a single floor apartment style arrangement with her room bordering her sister's which then led down into the kitchen and living room and the front door too. She stepped lightly on the floorboards, and...

*Creeeeeeaaaak...*

She stopped, waited for a second, no voice... no reply... no movement.

Maybe she'd get lucky?

She scuffled over, past the kitchen, climbed over the couch, touched the doorknob...

"Where do you think you're going?"

"HUAGH!" Kira bounced at least three feet into the air and her heart raced quickly. She was so sure she had made it too...!

She spun and stood in front of the door handle and smiled awkwardly as her sister stood with ever-folded arms. "Wren! Hey... haha. Hey. Hay. Hey! What are you doing out of your room? You're usually... beating the shit out of a punching bag this time of night."

Wren squinted. "You didn't answer my question."

"Going somewhere? I'm not going anywhere." She spun the doorknob. "Huh! I could have SWORN that this needed some greasing. It was squeaking like a demon earlier.." Kira put her finger on her lip and was, mhm, definitely thinking very hard about it. Clearly she had years of experience with locks, like she might as well have been a small blonde engineer girl from the dwarven district. "Yeah mm. Maybe it was one of the mechanisms..."

Wren sighed and rolled her eyes. "Just admit you were going to see your friends...?"

"So I'm allowed then?" Kira asked, getting all excited for a moment but immediately becoming visibly depressed when the answer was evidently no.

"You got into another fight today... I saw what your mage friend did too. I don't trust you."

"Come on! That was an accident, Rosie didn't actually emulsify them! She stopped when I asked her to!"

"It's because you don't think, Kira. I taught you for self defence, not so you could stumble into fights for no reason."

"Pretty rich coming from you... I heard what you were like when you were my age." Kira grumbled.

"And then I grew up."

Kira looked away and stormed back towards her room. "Not gonna let me fucking do anything are you."

She slammed her door to make her point.

About two hours later, Kira heard a knock on her door.

She didn't reply, but she saw it creak open just enough for a sliver of light to come through.

"Can I come in?"

Again, Kira didn't reply. Eventually though, Wren came in anyway and sat perched on the corner of the bed.

"I'm sorry. I'm just worried about you."

Kira wasn't looking in her direction, leaving it up to Wren to speak and mould things over.

"I don't like to think you're going to get hurt... I know what you're gonna say. You can handle yourself... but, there's a lot more out there than just New Syndicate goons. Alright? I know that, trust me. I did a lot before coming to Stormwind and I've seen it with my own eyes. I know I can probably handle it but... that's my job. It's not your job to do that."

Wren glanced over and saw Kira was resolute, and took a breath.

"I don't want to stifle you. You're old enough to make your own choices.."

"You've been stifling me for a while." Kira said. "You're not my mom."

Wren shook her head. "No... I'm not." She took that in for a moment. "And who needs moms anyway?"

They stopped talking for a bit, and Wren eventually conceded.

"Go on. I'm not gonna stop you. I can't. If you wanna go see your friends. Just please... don't get hurt?"

Kira nodded. She still felt bad this even needed to be an issue at all. She wrapped her arms around Wren for a brief moment before heading out the front door, but Wren lingered in Kira's room for a bit.

She loomed around the room, cluttered and messy that it was. Memories bubbled in her mind.

But it wasn't like that anymore. And maybe there was no point lingering on the past.

Wren went back to her room and pulled out a punching bag and laid into it harder with each hit, all the while being watched by a photo on her shelf.

A photo with three people.

## The Sculptor

Kira had always been a creative soul. There was this part of her brain that easily manifested what she saw inside her mind's eye into being. It was an undeniable benefit to have as an aspiring designer, as she was able to take concepts she considered either from real world examples or her favourite magazines and sketch them down on paper or create proofs of concept that would otherwise be locked away inside her head. It was also why she became quite skilled in moulding the earth... as she was doing so right now.

No one would have minded the hunk of quarried stone hefted from the ruins of the building Wren destroyed the other day, especially as it was now in ruins. *She was just helping clean things up!* She now had it in her room, and held in her hands an invisible chisel and hammer as she carved away at the stone as if it was marble.

"No, her chin kind of.."

"Her hair is going to be hard to layer..."

"And what about the flick of her eyes...?"

She began to blush as she gazed at the facsimile she began to form, cresting the curve from uncanny into being close enough. It wasn't quite there. The finer details had been blurred from memory. The position of each freckle or the exact ripple pattern of her ribbed earlobe. But this was it. This was her obsession.

Kira imagined the stone speaking.

*"I am Rosie."*

She imagined it saying something she heard it say a lot.

"Yes."

That wasn't enough. She needed more.

*"The elements are dangerous and should be imprisoned."*

The lilt in her voice... such certainty. More.

*"I am looking for a pyromancy master."*

And she had such drive too! She plumbed the depths of this desperation, down into delusion.

*"Kira, would you like to-"*

Well-trained ears heard the door handle click...

A bedcover flung, hand flung outwards, the bust thrust into the corner of the room.

"Kira. Are you alright?" Wren asked, coming into the messy room and barely being able to hear anything. "Heard some voices."

Kira seethed. Come on!! Just at the good part!

"I'm fine!!" She blubbed. "None of your business anyway!"

She didn't mean to come off so rude, yet the deal was done. Wren shrugged because she was well used to little outbursts like this and though to some extent knew it wasn't a teenager she was dealing with and thus was somewhat disappointed by her attitude it was something she had learned to endure. "Fine. It's just late. Remember we've got thin walls."

Kira heard the door click again closed. But the moment had passed.

She flung herself on her bed and covered her face with her pillow.

She imagined Rosie, sitting on the edge of the bed looking over her and felt herself begin to calm.

Kira had been through this before. Simple infatuations didn't mean much beyond attraction.



But there was one other thing that Kira choosing to create her obsessions in stone meant. Those creations were permanent. And she clung onto them, never wanting to let them go.

## A Big Mistake

“Come on Kira!”

“No, dumbass! It’s dangerous!”

“So that makes it alright for you?”

“It’s different because I know what I’m doing!”

Merrick was practically begging on his hands and knees now, pleading pathetically.

*Was this how he managed to win Liv over? By acting like a big baby?*

“I know I wasn’t the best student for Wren, but I’m not asking to learn how to fight! I just want to *be free*! Like you! Jumping over rooftops and running really fast? Come on!”

A few years ago, Wren had tried to pass on her knowledge of the elements to people other than Kira. She knew she wouldn’t be around forever; someone had to carry on her legacy, and placing all that responsibility onto her sister wasn’t what she wanted for her.

There would have been one person to represent and learn each element, and Merrick was chosen for Air. But knowing Merrick... it went exactly as you’d expect. He was a truant, lazy, he never paid attention and spent most of his time fucking around. Eventually he got bored, called it lame. And now here he was, having forgotten how to do it, miraculously realising how important it was...

Kira ran her hands up through her hair. “Why now? Why’s this so necessary now? You weren’t born with it.”

“I was though, right? I was born with the ability to do it! Wren said that it comes to some people naturally, they just... they just can, right?”

“So you *did* listen.” Kira groaned.

“I did! I was young, alright? Young and dumb. She won’t give me another chance but you could! *Please!* I just gotta know what it feels like again. It’s like I lost a part of myself.”

She couldn’t know how that felt. Since as long as she could remember Kira had been able to at least throw rocks, not a day goes by without her using some bit of her magic. So to lose it completely? She looked at Merrick and, perhaps wrongfully, saw someone that she should help. Like she owed something to him. How angry, hurt, disappointed might he be if she didn’t help? Would it push Liv even further away from her too?

She nodded. “Okay, whatever. Sure.”

“Hahahaha! Yesssss! Let’s go!” Merrick laughed and cheered. “This is going to be awesome! Kira, you’re sick haha!”

Kira rolled her eyes as she saw him take off. *Save the compliments for your girlfriend.*

“Alright, I’m not gonna go through this more than once so make sure you’re listening!” Kira did her best to mantle Wren’s focused tutelage as the loverboy musician seemed more interested with dangling his feet off the edge of the wall than he was with paying attention to her. She had to jangle some keys in front of him before he paid her heed again.

*At least when Wren is teaching me I actually listen to her!*

"Okay. Let's do this. Air time!" Merick called out.

Kira had him hold onto her talisman and eventually got him to move his legs to be sitting in a meditative cross legged stance. They were quite high up here, and a cool wind whipped past their hair... his by this point almost being as long as hers but far less well groomed... and she said "Now close your eyes... focus on your breathing. Let the wind carry you."

"I could have done this the whole time." Merrick frowned and looked at Kira. She shrugged. None of them were spiritual, none of them understood the magic deeply. They weren't mages, nor were they sages. Not even Wren. But she made a best guess.

"Wren says the talisman helps you reach out. It's like a crutch for babies learning to walk. So hold it and just focus, okay?"

She'd have to be his crutch, too. Hold his hand.

She breathed in, and out.

Merick breathed in, and out.

She listened to the rustling of the trees,

He heard it too.

Kira imagined what it meant to be light, free, unburdened.

Maybe Merrick already knew that, understood it better than her.

They only needed to sit for fifteen minutes, and Kira started to sense him stir.

"Sit down..." She mumbled.

"I am sitting... but I don't feel the ground anymore!"

Kira peeked her eyes open.

"Ah! You're floating!!"

Merick's eyes shot down too to see his legs hovering an inch above the floor, and wiggled his legs wildly until he finally touched down again. "I did it!!"

Kira pursed her lips. "WE did it."

"Yeah, yeah. Right. Well, I'm gonna go surprise Liv with this. She's gonna be so stoked!"

"Wait! Don't you need practice?" Kira shouted, but there was no point.

He'd already darted off, clumsily bounding across the rooftops.

She shook her head and felt a growing sense of discomfort, held a hand to her cheek.

What had she just unleashed?



## Jealousy

As it was said over and over again, the two reasons people came to South Ward were for the markets and the nightlife and both were thanks to Wren. With the town remarkably safe, especially compared to anywhere else in Old Town, South Ward was able to have a flourishing scene of clubs and bars and late night eateries which stayed open hours past midnight. Especially since the rather disappointing destruction of the *Gates of Hell* over in North Ward people had begun to file down through the layers of the under-city deep into where tonight's party was being held.

Here, at a popular spot near the bottom end of the underground tunnel complexes was where Kira spent her night. She had come with Liv and Merrick, a fun outing for the three of them that was meant to reignite their friendship after a recent spat... but Kira didn't know what she expected. Again, the third wheel. Liv and Merrick danced and kissed and ran their hands down each other so much it made Kira want to vomit just being near them. Again, she found herself looking on from the snack bar at two silhouettes.

She wished Rosie were here. At least the two of them could be loners together. Kira could grumble and complain and Rosie would listen to her so intently, interspersed with comments of "I see" or "I do not see".

Who was she kidding? Someone as quiet as Rosie would hate it here.

Rosie would probably hate parties.

But right now, so did Kira.

Kira idly scanned the room, and soon all thoughts of Rosie faded from her mind. She had just seen someone beautiful.

Forgive Kira, but as far as her infatuations went they did not require exclusivity... if her continued pining over Liv had not made that clear enough.

She rode her passions to the lengths they would take her and maybe she learned that nothing never really meant anything. She was young. Let her dream.

And dream she did, as she gazed over at the bar. She saw a figure with ash blonde hair cascading over her shoulders from the right side of her face, with just the faintest tips parting them. An elf? They weren't uncommon in South Ward, but neither were they usually as elegant as her. She had the most striking eyes, defined by her mascara in wide flicks that gave her an aura of intensity and beauty that Kira could not look away. And her dress! It was stunning, sleek black with a slit on one side to reveal long, slender and unblemished legs flowing down to her heels. And the neckline was cut... very, very low. But that wasn't the sort of dress you'd wear to a party like this. Not to dance, not unless you were basically begging for attention. Kira felt remarkably underdressed, her own outfit really just a crop top and a skort because she had fully intended to join her friends on the dance floor. When she looked over at them, Merrick's hands were wrapped around Liv's waist from behind and she looked up and reached to kiss his cheek...

*Fuck them.*

Courage didn't come easily for Kira. Sure, *Live Fast, Hit Hard* and all but... she couldn't just approach the unknown beauty without reason. She'd hate to come off as creepy or rude, she was nowhere near as much a player of the flirting sort of persuasion as she liked and she knew she crumbled all too quickly under pressure; the exact sort of thing you were meant to not do if you were an Earth wielder like her! So she sat, with her snacks she suddenly felt no appetite for, and waited.

Thankfully, waiting until your time to strike was one part of being an Earth wielder she was very good at.

Kira noticed the woman fiddling with her dress... sitting on the barstool as she did, it seemed she twisted improperly, caught it under the stool's leg, as she went to move there was a *rip*... she gasped, looked around terrified to see if anyone had noticed. She panicked. Kira tried not to look as she saw the seam of her dress in the slit tear far too high even for her sort of persuasion, revealing a little too much. She rushed off to the bathroom. Kira, as it so happened, also needed to freshen up.

It was like an island safe from raging storms. The sounds of this year's most incessant pop beats, including one where the entire song's lyrics was just *Get Down With Dalaran* over and over, were blessedly dulled in here. The buzzing lights sobered Kira somewhat, and as she rounded the corner she spotted the woman fussing over the seam.

"No, no, no... I have to return this, come on..." Kira heard her mumble. She played it cool... she hadn't followed her in or anything. Kira washed her hands, face, adjusted her makeup... and made her move.

"Oh no..." She glanced over like she only just noticed. "Did it get torn?"

The woman mumbled. "Yeah... my fucking luck, one night I come out..."

Kira grinned, holding up her needle and thread. "Your luck? I'm a tailor."

The woman's expression immediately changed. "Holy fuck, are you serious?" Hope was written clean over her.

"Not gonna be holding a sewing kit for show, am I? I always bring it... usually for me but, if you need help."

The woman stood to the side and showed Kira the ravine. It did look pretty bad, all things considered... such a delicate material. She must have paid a fortune for this.

"It's a beautiful dress." Kira smiled, focusing on choosing a thread that matched the colour of the dress. It wasn't lost on the woman either that Kira so deftly levitated her obsidian needle to piece it back together. If anything it made her feel safer.

"It's not mine... I rented it, not like I get the chance to come out often?"

By the time Kira was done, it was right back to looking how it did before with no trace left behind. "And now you won't get charged for the full price. You happy with it?" Customer satisfaction was, as always, her top priority.

"You're an actual lifesaver..." Her smile meant everything, worth a hundred gold. "Thank you so much."

Kira returned the pleasantries too. "Always happy to help."

She didn't have the courage to make another move, admittedly. It was a good moment. A wholesome moment. She'd made this connection and she had helped someone. She couldn't ruin it by...

"Wait a moment." The woman said, bringing her finger up to her lips. "You're the girl from the snack bar!"

That was the last thing Kira wanted to be called. Her heart jumped out from her chest and sprinted at full pelt down the corridor and through the window. "Huh?? Me?"

The woman snorted. "Yeah, you. Saw you getting third wheeled. If we're both getting lucky tonight, your luck is having someone to grab a drink with. Come on."

Kira's heart pounded. *What does she mean by get lucky?*

Before Kira knew it, two drinks had been laid before them. The woman shouted over the sound of the music. "I'm Serina. You?"

Maybe trying to have a conversation in a noisy club was a poor idea, and with the thrumming footsteps rattling the floor Kira could hardly get a sense for what she was saying. She followed the movements of those dark lips as much as she could and just about caught what she was saying.

"I'm Kira."

"Oo, cute name." Serina giggled and leaned in closer, maybe having some difficulty speaking too. Kira's heart raced as they put their chairs closer and Kira took a sip from her drink like it was a defensive manoeuvre. "So... you're a mage then?" Serina asked, a quick smirk and an even closer lean sending waves down Kira's spine. She had to ground herself, build up her fortifications. But why? Wasn't talking, following her passions, having the chance to speak to Serina her goal? Something wasn't right but Kira couldn't explain it. She assumed it was that she didn't want to embarrass herself.

"Not a mage... but... it's magic? Apparently?" She didn't want to bore Serina with the details.

"I'm fairly sure you're a mage by definition if you're doing magic." Serina tilted her head and looked at Kira sideways, who took yet another sip. *Someone else* had said that to her too.

"Haha... guess so?"

The conversation went on, and Kira did her best to keep up. It was clear Serina was leading this, she wanted to talk to Kira for... whatever her reasons might have been. They talked about the other parties in the area, what places they'd go if they could finally break out from the city, holidays they'd been on... Kira spoke briefly about Pandaria, but to cleave off so many details and specifics felt downright disrespectful. Serina wouldn't want to know about that grisly business though... and neither would she want to know about...

"Alright. I'm gonna just pop out for a bit, didn't actually get the chance to sort myself out earlier with you sewing my dress back up... so, I'll be back?" Serina winked and left, looking briefly back at Kira before turning into the bathroom. Kira rubbed her forehead. Why did this feel so wrong?

Maybe, maybe, it was because she was hungry.

Ah, the snack bar. Her ever welcoming friend. At the snack bar there were no social expectations, no one you needed to talk to but the crumbly, oily pastry of mini sausage rolls. It occurred to her that clubs like this almost never had snack bars. There was no point in catering food when people were too busy dancing or drinking. It was like this one was made solely for her, to be her escape, for it to give her the chance to breathe.

As usual, she observed as she ate. She looked across the dancefloor. By now she couldn't even see Liv and Merick. Had they ditched her? Probably off smooching in some inn room right now... she couldn't stand thinking about it. Was Serina back yet? It had been long enough. Kira resolved herself to it... why shouldn't she smooch some cute girl tonight too?

That was odd. Some dude was going over to their spot. Kira almost shouted to tell him those seats were occupied but it's not like he could have heard from this far and during a loud-ass song like this. For a moment he stood facing the bar, then seemed to check his surroundings. She couldn't see what he was doing... it wasn't like he was talking to the bartender, he was all the way up on the other end. Before she knew it he turned, put something in his pocket and left to go sit a few seats up.

Did he just do what she thought he did? For a moment she was stunned. Clubs in South Ward were meant to be safe... if she'd been a bit wiser, or quicker, she might have stopped it. *All part of the sisterhood* she thought, tearing herself down from the inside.

Kira remained in shock until she saw Serina come back and sit down, and rushed over to meet her.

"Where were you?" Serina's eyebrows curled. "Ohh... snack bar, got it."

"I'm really sorry Serina but I was over there and I think this guy put something in your drink!"

"Seriously?" She grimaced, pushing it away. "Glad you were over here looking after it..."

Kira hung her head. "I know... but, I saw the guy who did it. I'm gonna go talk to him."

"Why, what are you gonna do?"

"Make sure he doesn't do it again."

Kira wasn't like Wren. She hadn't a sense of righteous indignation, of justice, to tear down the gangs of the city that stomped on the little guy. Usually if Kira got into fights it would be because of her own dumbassery and not realising she was in a fight until she was there. They were quick, messy, and largely painless. This would be the first time she could remember she was seeking one out. With that being said, she didn't intend this to be painless.

The guy was one of those smarmy little bastards who thought looks would let him get away with just about anything... like going to the gym six times a week meant the world owed him favours. She held Serina's glass in her hand and stormed over to him, so he had already turned to speak by the time they came over. He seemed oddly pleased his mark had come to him... but was less pleased to see Kira.

"Was hoping I'd get a chance to talk to you..." He spoke with a mellifluous tone, like warm honey, as he looked at Serina. "But I don't know who you are."

"I'm with *her*." Kira put her foot down and shoved the glass in his face. "Recognise this?"

"A glass? Don't know what you're talking about." Just as soon as the words left his mouth Kira splashed him in the face with it. He stumbled off the seat, his eyes red and burning.

"Ahh! You bitch, you got that in my eye!"

"You'll lose a lot more than your eye if you keep on trying to drug people! My Big Sis does everything to keep this town safe from people like you, not gonna just... let you do whatever you want!" Serina looked on, aghast at the whole interaction, feeling in some part that this was because of her. The man growled and grabbed Kira by the throat and looked almost like a demon through his burning red lenses. "Yeah? And where the fuck is she now?"

Kira steeled herself and strained through the grip he had on her neck. "Right... here!"

She kicked her leg up, summoning a column from the laminated marble floor right between his...

**CRUNCH!**

The bartender, other clubbers both on the stools and the dance floor, and Serina... they all looked around and saw him clutching his crotch and crumbling to the ground.

Kira couldn't hide her snarl nor her disdain as she breathed freely.

"Can someone get in here and clean this fucking scum up off the floor?"

Maybe she wasn't so different from Wren after all.

She went outside, Serina following close behind.

Clear air helped her settle, and think.

She could've handled that better... sorted him out better.

Kira gripped the wall by the canalside and looked up at the moon.

What was she doing?

Serina came up beside her.

"So... earth magic, hm."

Kira snorted. "That was your takeaway from that?"

"I don't know... from where I was standing it was pretty impressive."

Kira was in disbelief. After all that... and she did fully believe that it was her fault... Serina was still interested?

Here in the moonlight her hair shone like a mirror, dappled with sparkles. She wanted this.

She wanted this. She wanted this.

Serina moved her hand closer to Kira's. "You really killed the party but... I think I know somewhere we can carry it on?"

The tone of her voice meant Kira knew exactly what she was trying to say.

"Like, another party, or...?" She feigned ignorance, her last defence.

Serina rolled her eyes. "So you can control rocks, and you're dumb as one too? It's a good thing you're cute." Serina stepped closer, face inches away from hers, and said "I would like to take you home. Is that clear enough?"

Kira was allowed to dream, to play, to follow her heart, to mess around, kiss who she wanted, fantasize, *do what she wanted*.

But is this what she wanted?

It felt wrong. That's all she knew. She wanted it, but she could *not* let herself have this.

Kira inched backwards. "I'm sorry, I... can't."

Serina pursed her lips and looked away. "No, no. I get what this is. I see."

Kira looked up at her as Serina's voice raised, cracking. "You've... been talking me up this whole night, flirted, and then it gets too real and you back off?"

Let me guess, you've got someone else that you weren't sure about... and now, when it gets to be MY time, you realise that you need to be faithful? Is that it? Everyone just loves using me to figure out their own issues! But when is it going to be my turn?"

The accusation cut her to the core. Where was this coming from? She barely even had a moment to reply before Serina continued. Kira spiralled in confusion, stammering a few words out. "No, it's..."

"Word of advice? Maybe don't ruin someone's whole night if you don't even know what you want."

Serina left as quick as she'd come, like dust carried on the wind.



## Mint Chocolate Ice Cream

Kira was home stuffing a tub of mint chocolate ice cream into her face, buried under a mountain of blankets. Wren gave one of her signature warm hugs.

"I don't know what's wrong with me... I fucked it up with Liv, I fucked it up with Serina..."

"Liv wasn't your fault." Wren said. "She didn't know what she wanted either. The fact she ended up with Merrick? Eugh."

Kira mumbled. "Yeah, Merrick's gross."

"I like to think that I have perspective." Wren said as she snuck a little bit of Kira's ice cream onto her own spoon. "I never did this relationship stuff but literally everyone around me has, and they always get so drawn into it that they can't see it clearly. But I can. So, I'm gonna give you my thoughts and you can either take them as the knowledge of a master that they are or leave them. Sound good? Either way, you have two options on where to think. I'm either right or wrong."

Kira appreciated Wren's decisiveness. Things were easier when they were binary, one thing or another, rather than the muddy middle ground puddle that she'd been steeped in for as long as she knew.

"Sure. Hit me."

"You didn't feel right about Serina because it meant nothing. You loved, really loved Liv because you were friends first. You had a connection."

"I had a connection with Serina too..."

"You had one night's worth of connection with her. You knew Liv for years before you dated. And now there's someone else that you have a strong connection with."

"Who...?"

"Don't act dumb, sis." Wren snorted. "Rosie."

"What? Haha... no, no..."

"Come the fluff on! Every single time I mention her you get all mushy and melty, you're blushing right now, you carved a literal sculpture of her face!"

"You saw that...?"

"Mhm. It was pretty accurate too."

"But I've not known Rosie for that long either..."

"As dumb as it sounds... you've fought together. Got into trouble together. That makes a stronger bond than you might think."

Kira thought the same with Serina, but it's not like she went to Pandaria and fought a dangerous pyromancer caged inside a mountain like a dragon together.

Kira munched a big slab of ice cream, like a block of stone in a quarry. "It's not like we're together or anything... why couldn't I just have fun with Serina tonight and then go back to Rosie after? Am I not allowed...?"

"Because then you really would have been leading them on. And you're not like that. You want something meaningful. You want something deep. You know with Serina it would go for this night and no longer. But you can see something more with Rosie. I'm your Big Sis. Trust me. I know. I'm smart."

Kira chuckled and nodded. Maybe she was still following her heart... it just didn't lead her the way she thought it was going to. Serina would have just been a way for her to get back at Liv and Merrick... and it would have meant nothing. She should have realised it sooner, but better late than never.

The long night drew longer. Wren had gone to bed. Kira crashed out on the couch.  
She remembered who had snuck through the midtown tunnels with her.  
She remembered the person she'd saved from being scammed.  
She remembered who stood up to Wren with her.  
She thought about the time they went to the Brawlpub, cheering from the stands at.  
She smiled thinking about her first time in Pandaria, and who had looked over her and made sure she was safe while she slept.  
And messing around on the way down to the monastery.  
And ditching the dumb lorewalker guy who wouldn't even read them a scroll.  
And promised she'd avenge her master's master.

She remembered she made a promise to Rosie, that she would let her be in her true form any time.

That connection meant more than a single night for sure.  
*Live fast, hit hard, and never forget where you come from.*  
Kira wouldn't forget what Rosie meant to her.

## Ritual

In all the stress and excitement of the last two weeks, Kira had forgotten something important.

She had been home from work for a couple of hours now. It had gone fine; Kira was allowed a holiday and she was very lucky for that though Adrienne would of course have preferred more notice. Things had swiftly returned to normal. She cleaned the room while Wren cooked, trying to make something healthy for once.

Kira wondered if Wren had forgotten, too. So she asked.

“Are we still lighting the candles?”

Wren seemed surprised. Usually it was her who asked, not the other way around.

“We don’t have to if you don’t want to. I’ll do it.”

“No, it’s okay. I’ve been practicing. I might be able to do it this time.”

All families had little rituals. Some celebrated the turn of the seasons, new harvests, the solstices, birthdays, getting new jobs or escaping old ones.

Kira and Wren were no different, in that way.

It was a solemn affair, silent. Wren and Kira went that night when it was already dark away from South Ward, across the district to the eastern park. It wasn’t as nice as the big one on the north side of the city with the Embassy, the Tushui island, or the lake.

This one was cold. Leaves turned to a sticky, pulpy mass under every step and the trees had given up on fall and had shed all their leaves. A barren wind scoured the field.

They found a stone. Wren laid down a set of six incensed candles and lit them each between her pinched fingertips and knelt in front in the mud as if she were meditating. She closed her eyes and breathed quietly. The rest was up to Kira.

It was easy at first. Since the last time they had come here the stone had started to wear away, stained by the rain and spattered with dirt. It just needed a little bit of maintenance to polish it. She hewed the stone, shearing the layers off to reform it without blemishes or bruises and yet this weighed heavily on her. How could she let it get like this?

*Does this not mean anything to me anymore? Am I starting to forget?*

The next step was harder, and Kira knew how Wren must have thought when it took her so long to attune to water instead. If she had practiced more she might have been able to. And this was the important part, almost sacred. She drew water from the vessel that Wren readied earlier, struggling to let it flow easily without it shuddering... she couldn’t risk dropping it. Not when they had already started. Not again.

But she breathed, and felt it begin to lightly rain. A single droplet fell on her hand. She shifted her focus to it instead, and stopped worrying so much about the blessed water.

She passed it over the lone pile of flowers growing under the stone and watered them.

She could finally breathe easy. Breath came easy now too, and focused on air again. She let freedom fill her lungs. Kira took the burning incense and swirled it overhead.

Rather than small clumps and clouds burning off the candles Kira spread the smoke as far as she could, letting it diffuse widely into the air around them. It smelled of cherry blossom.

Kira looked down and noticed something drop onto the floor, but it wasn't rain.

"Wren...?"

She crouched down next to her and hugged her tightly, trying to contain the small shakes coming off her sister's body. She took shallow breaths and heaved each one and things had already started and couldn't stop now. The tears ran down Kira's arm unchecked as Wren pulled Kira closer. She couldn't remember ever seeing Wren like this.

*"I miss him so much... why did he have to go so soon? I wasn't done with him. I still need him."*

"I miss him too." Kira blubbed, slowly letting her guard down too. If Wren was feeling it, then it was okay. "It's not fair."

Wren's hold on Kira turned from dependence to affection, now meant to show her care for her rather than to hold on dearly like she was clinging to a raft on a stormy sea. She brushed Kira's hair with her hands. "I'm sorry I made you feel like you had to run away. I *know* what that feels like, I should have never done it to you. I've already lost him. I can't lose you too."

"You won't lose me, sis. I'm here. I love you."

"I love you too."

Eventually, they ended the ritual, leaving candles fluttering in the wind and burning incense filling the air.

The words engraved on the stone glinted from the reflection of raindrops.

*"Jun,*

*Loving and caring brother,*

*We will never forget you."*

## Twin Philosophies

*About a week ago.*

Tushui warriors watched from the sidelines of the dusty arena, analysing each movement with patient interest.

Columns of earth rose from the dirt and immediately solidified into sandstone, shielding Kira from the lick of rushing flame that rolled out from behind her. Even still, behind her wall, she could feel the warmth and heat from the sides and even from the stone itself.

She needed a way out, but her stone would not hold forever. And she did not think of one in time.

The heat became too much to bear. Kira lurched away from the wall, and in doing so left herself open. Wren smashed through and touched her shoulder.

It was over though it had barely begun.

The warriors from the sidelines clapped, but not for her.

Kira had grown an impressive interest with the sand beneath her feet, and did not look up at her sister.

"Don't be too hard on yourself. Earth and Air are as opposite as two things can be."

"You told me other people can do it?"

"That's because they've practiced..."

"I've practiced!" Kira said, a little too loudly. She knew even attaining the smallest glimpse of mastery could take years in the martial arts. She never expected it to come easy. She just hoped she had made any progress at all. "I'm sorry..."

Wren frowned. "I'm not disappointed. I'm never disappointed. Remember, it took me years to..."

"Yeah. But you were strong. You were punching fucking holes through solid steel with just your bare hands." Kira replied, glancing at her in the corner of her eye.

"I didn't want to be strong." Wren said. "I became strong because I was angry, and hurt, and I had nothing to lose but everything to prove. You are a normal person. Don't judge yourself against me. Judge yourself against Merrick. Now *that's* a failure."

Kira smiled briefly.

*Today.*

Kira couldn't smile anymore.

Now Rosie was gone, and she was at work, there was no need to smile.

She pulled the needle to stitch up a pair of linen trousers. It was a shoddy, patchwork job.

There was nothing more Kira could do. People paid for utility, not aesthetics.

Liv still sat next to her.

*"Why are you so angry? What have I done to you? You're in a bad mood all the time now Kira. It's a total vibe-killer. It's your fault for getting with Rosie. What were you thinking? She's a mage, obviously she has issues. She's not even rich? Or she is, and she's hiding it from you. Merrick has problems but he genuinely makes me happy. He even promised me that we'd go to a concert together this weekend. Are you going anywhere with Rosie? Bet it's probably just for some smoked meats or whatever she goes on about, right?"*

Ignore her, and take the beating.

Change the subject, and find something else for her to complain about.

Kira had these two options before her in her mind.

She tried her best to ignore Liv. It was just another thing she had to deal with.

Liv couldn't understand. She wouldn't know because she had not told her.

*"Besides, she's kinda weird. Only gives one word replies, or short sentences. It shows she doesn't care about us. It's because she thinks she's above us."*

Kira felt her mind being gnawed away over and over by Liv's complaining.

*"It's like she's speaking without punctuation or something. Is she even bothering to listen? She hates all of us and wants to stop us talking so she can get back to her 'real job'".*

It wasn't fair on Rosie. It wasn't fair on her. It was wrong.

*"If she doesn't even have money what's the point? She might as well just be leeching off you. It's a shame you aren't with anyone better."*

She could not ignore her.

Kira pursed her lips and spoke.

*"Ugh. How does a guy even rip out the entire knee of his trousers anyway right...? What was he doing, getting a kneejob...?"*

Liv rolled her eyes. *"Probably had a mage come and burn his trousers off or something."*

*Right? You heard about that didn't you. Some burned up pair of trousers. Rosie didn't have anything to do with that, did she? She's the only fire mage here."*

*"Maybe it was Wren."*

*"She's just as bad. Sometimes I wonder why we don't just get the guard to do it. They're probably scared of her. She's a danger to everyone. How do we know she won't come after us next...?"*

Kira could not change the subject.

She suffered for eight more hours.

The general store was incomprehensibly busy for Friday.

Kira plucked up the items that were discounted or on sale, with the budget she had assigned to herself, and otherwise focused on her essentials. Spices were expensive so it was likely to be another week of sandwiches and rice bowls. It came as no surprise to Kira that these were the consequences of her actions. She had chosen to not save, rather to frivolously spend in the hopes of impressing Rosie and elevating the time they enjoyed together. These consequences, of course, stared her down through a can of kidney beans.

As it seemed, beans were popular today, and many families with prams and Old Lady Anafalaxis did their best to frustrate her ever more by coming closer and closer.

Another two choices presented themselves. Kira might stand her ground, forcing them to move around her, or rather weave through the crowds unperturbed by how they struggled and rushed.

Kira took too long to decide, perhaps hoping her decision would not need to be made. She hung loosely, pushed back first by the pram, then into three other people who would not budge before she did. Kira landed with a thud on the floor, face reddened from the shock and embarrassment. She was glad Rosie and Wren were not here to see this, but she was almost certain they would hear. The crowds did not part for her to stand up, nor did they help.

Kira suffered until she could escape.

Wren's challenge would come soon enough, and Kira tied on her belt. Her hands could not stop shaking.

"I'm not ready. I can lie to Rosie and Wren but they'll see when I get knocked on the floor again and again that I'm not there yet. And I'd be a liability to Rosie. But I don't want her to go on her own."

Kira would not defeat Wren with one element alone, and a wall as insurmountable as a mountain hung in front of her. She made no mistake. It was as tangible as the stone she wielded.

No amount of training, or preparation, or meditation could allow her to solve a mental failing. She had two choices in front of her.

Kira either face Wren head on and be annihilated, or lie and deflect and cheat so she need not fight her at all.

Kira would not let Rosie go on her own, but the two sides of her personality; the unyielding and the unbothered, the stalwart and the free, earth and air could not resolve a clear solution.

The two philosophies, her two sides, were too different.

She had to choose one or the other.

And if she couldn't make her mind up quick, then she was almost certain to lose.

## Word of Advice

Maybe Stormwind Cemetery would have been a better place for him.  
After all, would he really want to be here?  
It's slushy and wet and cold.  
Sure, during the summer you can see birds nesting in lush trees,  
And the sun dapples off of dewy leaves,  
But it's winter now, and there's not even snow.  
Her sneakers got all muddy.

Kira sat back against the stone.

"Hey big bro.  
You doing okay?"

"I get that.  
It must be pretty lonely.  
I'm sorry.  
I'm not a good sister.  
I should visit more."

"I used some Water the other day.  
Tried to copy the same shit you used to do.  
Remember that time you splashed me with mud?  
Oh I was royally pissed...  
But I miss it.  
I miss us."

"Yeah, Wren's being a bitch again.  
... come on, really?  
Don't look at me like that!  
You were always her favourite.  
We both know it.  
Yeah, yeah. Oldest child syndrome.  
You should see how she gets now though.  
Yeah.  
You're right.  
Maybe it came too late."

"I came 'cause I wanted to ask you something.  
And, yeah. Sorry.  
We can try the ritual next time.  
I'm not doing too great, to be honest."

"I feel like I'm losing my friends."

"... yeah, it's kinda been downhill since you."



“Rosie’s great, but she doesn’t want...”

“Don’t get me started, honestly.”

Kira smeared cold hands down her face.

“I wish I was independent like you were, is all.”

“You really think so?”

Kira looked at barren trees.

“Right. Well.

If you don’t mind.

I’m just gonna sit here a moment.

If I head back Sis is gonna jump on me right as I go through the door.

And sometimes I feel like I might as well not go back at all.

Not when the people I care about don’t care back.

And all I have is you.”

## On The Way To Work

Kira was on her way to work.  
It's Friday, so surely nothing weird can happen.  
Except that it always does.

Kira skated through an alley she usually takes a shortcut through, but one of the rocks in a pile of rubbish rubble rocked to the side and knocked her off.  
Thankfully, she caught herself before her clothes got all messed up.

"Did that rock just move?" She thought to herself. "Wasn't me that did it."

But then it spoke, and she definitely didn't do that.

"Help meeeeeeeee... shaman..."

Kira looked around to make sure there was no one there but it was definitely just her in this alley, her and this little rock.

She picked it up and turned it around and saw it had a little face chiselled into it... only, there was a big gash in the side. Its stony sorrow was plain to see.

"I'm injured... help..."

Kira squinted. "You just talked."

"I did..."

"You're a talking rock."

"Isn't that established already...? Yes... I'm a talking rock... and I'm dying..." He coughed some gravel at her and wheezed, eyes rolling back for a second. "Heeeeeeeelp meeee...!"

"Alright, alright, shut up already and I'll see what I can do."

This little fucker wasn't too different than a plushy toy in her mind, and she needed to fill in the stuffing that had fallen out. She punched a brick into sand, filled him back up, then carefully stitched the hole back up. Good as new!

All of a sudden, he sprang to life again.

He rolled out of her hand, grabbed a cane and tophat from the ground, grew a rocky moustache, and did a quirky little jig.

"Ra-ta-taaa~~ GOOD HEAVENS I'M WHOLE AGAIN!"

He had this terrible Gilnean accent too, for some reason.

He cha-cha'd up to Kira's side, grabbed her ankle with his stubby pebble arms and said,

"I SAY MY GIRL WHAT DO I OWE THE PULEASURE OF BEING RESCUED BY A SHAMAN SUCHASYOURSELF OFOFOFFO"

Kira raised an eyebrow. "You keep calling me that."

"Well it's true, isn't it? You can commune with the Elements..." The rock lifted his hat and kicked his legs out before jumping over his cane. "So isn't that exactly what you are?"

"People call me lots of stuff. I'm wondering more what you are."

"Wouldn't you, wouldn't you like to know? Ha haaa! Yes, I would be happy to introduce myself." He bowed deeply. "But unless you spoke an ancient primal dialect of Terran you would not be able to pronounce my name! So for your purposes, you may call me... Jim. P. Boulder, Earthlord of the Southern Continent."

"... isn't the southern continent Pandaria?"

"No, no! The Earthlord of the Southern Continent, the southern part of THIS continent! The Eastern Kingdoms or whatever the bollocks they're calling it nowadays. I swear thirty years ago it was Azeroth..."

"So is there an Earthlord of the Southern part of Pandaria too...? Like are you split up into cardinal directions or what?"

"My girl, ignore these questions for now, they bore me.

For adventure awaits!

Where shall I sit? A bag, a shoulder, pocket, under your hat, down your breeches perhaps?"

"Woah woah, buddy you aren't climbing down anything! What are you talking about?"

"You don't know? Well, it's almost like you don't want the help of an ancient elemental spirit! I was there when Therazane swung her mighty boulders around against N'zoth, you know. You are a shaman, I am an elemental spirit. Let us bind!! Do you not want the power that would come with it...?"

"What kind of power are we talking about..." Kira asked apprehensively.

"Power. Great power! Almost immediate mastery of Earthwielding, and its sub-categories too! Metal, glass, crystal, lava! Doesn't that sound amazing?"

Jim P. Boulder assessed her with his monocled eye. "Yes, yes. I can sense it in you. You feel weak. You need power to overcome someone who has wronged you, yes? Join with me..."

He pulled on his cane to reveal a sharpened edge inside. "Just... a little drop of blood, yes... just trade your blood..." His voice grew more sinister, he crept closer. "Then you'll be powerful enough to split the earth! Shake mountains! Create ravines at the flick of your wrist! The earth will be yours to mold like clay! And then we'll have this long, seven or eight months long journey where I slowly whisper into your ear and corrupt you... drive you to do things you always secretly wanted to but were held back from doing... and then... finally... I WILL RULE AGAI-"

"Sure."

"Huh?" Jim P. stopped in the middle of his villainous monologue, arms still held high. "I beg your pardon?"

"Yeah sure whatever." Kira shrugged. "Didn't have much else going on anyway." She held a hand out for him.

"Ohohoho young girl I knew you were gullible..."

Jim P. walked towards Kira, grabbed her hand, and...

"YOINK!"

Kira lifted him up, threw him high into the air.

"Wait, what? I thought we were going to bind!"

"Yeah right, you knob! I'm not falling for that one. Only a real dumbass would!"

Jim P. Boulder fell like a rock, right onto Kira's foot as she punted him high and away across the city and into the canal!

"But we were going to have a character development arc togetheeeeeeeeeer-!"

Kira dusted herself off.

"Well that's my random encounter sorted for the day."

## Letter in Her Coat Pocket

One of the girls at work standing in for Izzy after she left handed Kira a coat with a work order to fix the sleeve. "They asked explicitly for you."

Now, getting a direct order wasn't entirely surprising for Kira.

She was well-known by the community and many trusted that she would get their orders right. Kira was unofficially considered 'the best' of Adrienne's Tailors, and everyone knew that Kira could mend their garb with speed and precision, paying special attention to keeping the 'vibe' of the garment or to change it if that's what the custom order requested.

Even Mr. Mangetout had asked for Kira on multiple occasions to fix his church robes.

So when she got this coat, a warm fuzzy sort of coat perfect for the deep winter, it really didn't stand out to her much.

It lay waiting under her pile until she finally got around to it.

Kira lifted it up again and, now her mind could focus on it, it began to feel familiar. She knew this coat from somewhere. Was it the brand, did she see it in a magazine, on a passer-by? Definitely not, it was way too expensive for this town.

She looked it over. It was clean, too. Most coats that come along are a little bit dirty to make use of the laundering services they provide but there was not even a speck of dirt on it.

Not only that, the coat seemed perfumed. Almost intentionally so. It smelled like lavender, something hard to come by at this time of year. And that was familiar too!

The so called "torn" sleeve made this all feel like some sort of dumb prank. Kira knew that it hadn't ripped, snagged on a door handle or chewed off by a dog because there were no loose shredded threads. Instead there was a perfect clean line... like someone had taken a pair of scissors to it.

All of this was just too much to be a coincidence. Kira rubbed her head. Who would do this? Who'd go out of their way to specifically target her like this? What were they trying to tell her?

Well, that part was easy enough at least. Kira dipped into the coat pocket and found a letter.

*"It's me.*

*Have you figured out who that is yet?*

*I hear you're trying to solve a mystery.*

*Maybe I can help.*

*Meet me where we last saw each other tonight.*

*I'll be waiting."*

Kira folded the letter into her pocket, and found it hard to focus on sewing the coat back together for the rest of the day.

Suddenly, she became very aware of every single mistake she was making.

## Silver Hair Serina

The title might seem like a spoiler,  
but Kira knew as soon as she saw the letter who would be waiting for her.  
Serina, that beautiful woman she met at a party months ago,  
who she turned down in favour of Rosie.  
Kira couldn't lie that a little bit of her still felt anxious,  
anticipating why she might want to see her,  
Serina was waiting for her by the river under the moonlight,  
and Kira could not have been less prepared.

Serina watched her, eyes locked, all the way as Kira trudged up into speaking distance.  
It was oddly embarrassing, exposing, she wished she could have just appeared there or  
found Serina watching the reflection in the water but that would have been too easy.  
Serina had this intense look, this gravitational pull that Kira couldn't ignore.  
She stood out there in a nice dress.

"You look cold." Kira said, and handed her the coat she mended.  
Serina wrapped herself up, glancing at the sleeve so perfectly mended it was like there was  
never a tear at all. "Nice. Knew I could trust you."  
Kira smiled for a moment but it didn't last long. "So. What's up? What did you want to talk  
about?"  
"About that mystery, obviously." Serina tilted her head as she looked at Kira, expecting her to  
figure it out on her own as usual.  
"Has to be something pretty big for you to go all that way to set it up."  
"/ thought it was good. I thought it was smart." Serina added.  
"And I never said it wasn't. But you're not gonna like the answer to your question."  
Serina frowned. "Why? You don't even know what question I'm gonna ask..."  
"Only one question you could."  
Serina stopped, scrunched her face up. "Go on then. What's your answer?"  
"I can't."  
"Why? Is it because of her? Still? I waited months."  
"I never said it was a limited time thing."  
"You never said it was a one-only thing."

Kira rubbed her brow. "We spoke for one evening. Did I really make that much of an  
impression?" She looked at Serina, but her intense gaze had broken and now instead locked  
itself onto the monument in the distance. "You did."

Serina breathed.  
Kira folded her arms.

Kira wondered why she was even here at all.  
To give this a second chance?  
To pretend like it was possible?  
To indulge herself in maybe's?

Kira remembered last time, Serina excoriated her before she left.

*“Word of advice? Maybe don’t ruin someone’s whole night if you don’t even know what you want.”*

Kira knew what she wanted, this time.

“I’m gonna be honest. This sounds like your fault.

You come all the way out here, make some like... weird convoluted way to get me to meet up with you rather than just asking, and then get angry when I turn you down again?

No. I got other stuff to worry about. I was clear the first time.”

“But we had fun. You had fun!” Serina said, still holding onto that if she waited long enough or kept pushing that she would get her way.

“I did. And that’s all I need.”

Kira stuffed her hands in her pockets and walked off and let herself be truly, wholly unburdened.

She hadn’t felt this free in years.

## Boo-womp

That's the noise that Kira made when she woke up,  
An exhausted,  
Weak,  
Flatulent sort of noise.

Her head spun, and memories of the last night sloshed around like water in a swimming pool when a big guy jumps into it.

All she remembered was one thing about it, really.

*It was pretty awesome.*

But not all good nights come without cost. To be honest, ones with Rosie hardly ever did. She found some water on the side of the table and all but drowned herself in it, then checked a timepiece.

"Three in the afternoon? Fuck...! I missed work... Adrienne's gonna be pissed..."

Kira forced herself up, slowly twisting herself into a roll with every ounce of willpower she could muster (which admittedly wasn't much at this point in time).

It took her about ten minutes to reach the corner of the bed and fling herself off.

*THUD!*

And then begun her slow crawl...

Out of the hotel room, with great effort did she reach up to the doorhandle.

Past the dining area, and that waitress who was deeply displeased to see her.

Kira got out onto the street and everyone walked around her, ignoring the possible crackhead like their lives depended on it.

Eventually though, she spotted some boots she recognised. And that booming voice.

"Tides below, Kira. Get off the floor...!" Alaina trumpeted.

"I can't... too tired..." She dropped her head on the pavement.

Alaina lifted Kira up and saw the marks on her neck. "What happened to you?"

"I got sucked off... by a hot babe..."

Alaina saw Kira's gaunt skin, almost hollowed out, like a juice box drained from the straw.

She couldn't deny that she certainly looked like she had.

"You'd only just got out of the infirmary... damnit, let us help again."

Kira was slung over Alaina's shoulder like a sack of potatoes, and carried back.

"Beep.

Beep.

Beep.

Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep..."

"Doc, she's gone..."

Lula scrunched her nose and looked down. "MINRVA, don't do that! She's not dead."

MINRVA giggled and scuttled away, leaving Lula to look over Kira as she lay in a cot that Lula prepared for all the times her dumbass friends get into fights and need her to patch them up.

Kira had a tube inserted through her arm (nothing so fun this time) hooked up to one of those nutrient bags they have in hospitals.

Kira slowly began to recover and woke up again. She saw Lula through her blurry eyes, and saw the bag. "Is that cum?"

Lula rolled her eyes. "No... its IV fluid... Alaina says you passed out on the way home after getting uhm... 'sucked off'... you really need to be more careful."

"I was just celebrating my awesome badass win..." Kira said.

"By nearly getting yourself killed...?" Lula frustratedly rubbed her head. "Could someone just actually listen to my advice, for once..."

"Hey, you had an awesome badass win too! You had like, zappy glove and... the smoke gas bomb! You stabbed Shin in the shins... thanks for that he's a MASSIVE asshole."

Lula pursed her lips and breathed deeply to control herself. Why should it only ever be violence that people praise her? Maybe Kira wasn't so different than what she first thought.

"You need to rest..." Lula mumbled. "I'll be back in a few hours to check you haven't suffocated."

"Okay! Sure...!"

Kira watched Lula wander off, the door closed behind her.

It was pretty dark in there.

She heard the slow drip of the fluid.

Muffled arguing in the distance.

Sound of a plane overhead.

Man, this is so boring!!



## Robot Runway

*~It's Fashion Time~*

MINRVA stood at the door, struck a pose, then strut into the infirmary one foot after the other.

*For cold winter months,  
A stylish faux-fur coat,  
With padded inner lining,  
Never let the frost keep you from having fun.*

Minrva held her arms out in a t-pose and turned three-sixty, wobbled, then walked back out.

Five minutes later...

MINRVA returned, stomping in big sneakers. She stopped, then stepped, then jumped three times to show them off!

*Designer gear-force-one trainers,  
Durable, breathable, and fashionable,  
Who ever said engineering couldn't be girly?  
These cutesy pink sneakers with gold cogs say otherwise.*

And then, MINRVA ran off again.

And then she came back again!

This time she shuffled in, wearing a onesie that covered her from head to toe.

Kira almost cried from how cute she was, like a little plush toy.

MINRVA dragged her blanket behind her and whipped it at Kira's feet.

*Inspired by modern designs,  
This murloc-onesie is warm and perfect for cuddles in the Caer.  
Wow the crowd and make them gush too,  
Made with real and ethically sourced lambswool, it's certain to turn hard robot edges into soft and snuggly.*

Kira leaned over and lifted MINRVA onto the cot.

"You did great, lil' sis!"

Up high!

Down low!

Fistbump!

Slap left, slap right.

Twiddle fingers...

Round the back,

Pinch your nose...

Smackdown!

MINRVA was a robot, so she could memorise such a secret handshake pretty easily compared to a real baby.

“You like your new clothes?”

“Mm-mm!” MINRVA nodded. “Make more!”

“Heh... I don’t have the stuff to do that right now. Alaina will have to pick up some more stuff for you.”

MINRVA jumped up and down on Kira’s chest again and again, and even Kira felt pain from the surprisingly heavy baby repeatedly applying her weight. “MAKE MORE MAKE MORE MAKE MORE!”

“Alright! Haha, sure. You can help me practice some new designs for my big project as soon as Alaina gets me some new materials. Okay?”

“BUT I WANT THEM NOWWW!”

Kira pulled out a sketchbook and a set of coloured crayons to hand to MINRVA.

“How about you help me with the designs?”

“Yayyy!!!”

MINRVA plonked herself down next to Kira, and started to work with all the colours of the rainbow.

Kira had her work cut out for her with this one.

## How to Clean Your Dragon

The wall to Rosie's cave crumbled away as Kira snuck in. She carried a big bucket with her and set it down in one corner of the room. Rosie was still asleep. She came in and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek, then got to work.

This had become something Kira did every couple of days, something she even looked forward to. She knew Rosie would look after her in the same way. She wanted to return the favour.

Kira knew Rosie had been awake since she had last been here from one particular present left for her in the corner of the room, and swiftly flushed the thing before scrubbing the spot it was.

Kira opened up a few more holes in the wall to let more fresh air in, and sprayed anti-odour generously about its confines.

She reached into her bag and set Rosie's bowl with a selection of dried and roasted meats, the sort of thing that would hold for a long time just in case it was a while until she woke up. She also left her lots of water, flavoured fruit juices, some insta-coffee, and even a bottle of wine. Just in case she wanted something different.

Then came the hard part... washing.

Kira had, she thought, managed to set up a pretty decent system to allow her to do this. After watching Lula work on her machines, especially her vehicles and those she lifted parts with her crane, Kira realised she may need to do something very similar with Rosie.

First, Kira raised the earth underneath Rosie, and she knew she would sleep through this without being disturbed because even her stomping the ground never woke her before. Kira then manipulated Rosie by lifting her from above with a big stone crane-hand, but even so she was so incredibly heavy Kira nearly broke a bone just doing so.

Once Rosie was in place, Kira swiftly replaced dirty sheets with fresh ones, and spent time there to scrub up and dry the remaining sheets before packing them away in a little rock cabinet she had made, the furniture of the house looking like a carved copy of a real room.

Finally, with some soap and a rag, Kira gently cleaned and polished Rosie's scales until they shined, and gently did the same for her underside, horns, wings, tail, and even broke three files on her nails before eventually realising she had no chance unless she used gravel.

The process was long, arduous, about three hours in total. But it was worth it.

Kira hoped that somewhere, deep down in her dreams, Rosie would recognise her coming in to care for her and sleep a little easier.

Kira had some more time today.

She got some nail polish out and painted Rosie's claws and talons. Maybe she would like that too.

