“Salvation from Death”

Today is my coming of age party, which I’m spending at home with my family. My great-grandmother came a moment ago, and my uncle will come soon too.

He’s my mother’s brother and also my godfather. He lives in Italy, so I only see him once in a blue moon. My dad doesn’t like him, so he visits us barely ever.

“Narissa, my dear, are you dating somebody?” My great-grandmother ask me. I really don’t like talking about this topic, because I don’t need a boyfriend. Men these days are stupid and conceited, so I ignore them.

“No, grandma, I’m still waiting for the perfect one, my love at first sight.” I say and Crimson, my brother, starts laughing.

“I saw a pretty man in the shop next to my house yesterday. High brunet with gray eyes, maybe you know him?” She says, not wanting to end the topic.

When I want to answer her, I hear that someone is knocking on the door. My mom goes to open the door, and after a while we all hear my uncle laughing.

“Nari, you old emo ass, come to your favorite godfather!” He calls me, so I go to him, laughing at the same time.

“Hey, how was the flight?” I ask.

“Good, except for the crying baby next to me. Alright, I didn’t sit for twelve hours in the flight to speak about it. I have a very special gift for you. Look, this is…”

“You will give her a present after the cake, because we have been waiting for you for an hour. Take off your shoes and come to the living room.” My dad interrupts him and uncle just rolls his eyes.

*Some things never change*.

When my family sings happy birthday to me, I start to feel the absence of Amarissa, my sister from another mother.

We had known each other since childhood. We always went to the same classes and were inseparable. Unfortunately her parents died in a car accident when we were thirteen and ever since she was raised by her aunt.

As we grew up, we became interested in the topic of death and life after it. We traveled extensively to see the lavish churches and cemeteries we had read about on the Internet and in books.

Regrettably, when she was alone in the graveyard, someone stabbed her to death. I never found out who it was, but he left the dagger, covered in her blood, next to cold body. I begged the policemen to let me take the dagger after the case was over.

*I still have it.*

Now, half a year after her death, I still blame myself for not being able to go with my beloved best friend this one and only time.

“My lovely granddaughter, I hope you’ll like it” My grandmother pulls me out of my memories, handing me a hand-knitted black balaclava and hat. After that, she hugs me and wishes all the best.

“You're really annoying and weird sometimes. You're always hogging the bathroom when I need to go there, always taking my hoodies and t-shirts, what irritates me, but you’re the most important person in my life. Truly, despite your flaws, I wouldn't trade you for another sister. I love you more than anyone else Narissa, remember it.” Crimson says with tears in his eyes, what makes me cry. We often argue and then immediately make up, but we never say such important words to each other.

“I love you too, Crim.” I say and snuggle into him. No words are needed at this moment, only emotions matter.

As I step away from my brother, I see my uncle standing behind him, holding… a large cardboard box?

“You must be wondering what the deal is with this box if it's so big and empty. Don’t worry, I have handwritten instructions for you, but I can explain it to you better and in an easier way than a piece of paper.” He says, placing the box in front of me.

I have too many questions for him in my head, so I just stand silently and watch. I don't understand what could be explained about an ordinary carton box.

“Okay, everything is ready, me too, but what about you? Are you ready for an amazing adventure?” Uncle asks, what makes me confused.

“What are you talking about? What an adventure and what does a box and instructions have to do with it? I don't understand.”

“You are right, sorry. I forgot about the step of saying what this is all about. Therefore, as you may have already guessed, this isn't an ordinary box. This is a teleporter. When you climb in, close the lid and your eyes. Then think about where you would like to be. You will be transported wherever you want, this place doesn't have to exist at all. I heard that someone teleported this way to the land of elves, another person to Hogwart[[1]](#footnote-0) and to heaven. The only thing that limits you is your imagination.”

“But what’s the catch? Sorry, uncle, but I don't believe in magic.” I say, because it all sounds really weird.

“Yes, I may have missed one rather important detail. So, once you are in another land, you must take a creature that is native to that other land with you to return home.” He says, scratching his head nervously and smiling softly.

What the hell? It must be just a stupid joke, because how could I convince, for example, an elf to come back with me?

“Oh, come on! Don’t look at me like I'm a madman, even if I’m. Everything I said is true, try it yourself”

“Leave her alone, Moris.” My mom suddenly speaks up. “Narissa is too old to believe in your nonsense. She doesn't even want to teleport to…”

“I’ll go.” I interrupt her and climb into the box. “Is there a time limit before I have to come back?”

“Yes, you have forty-eight hours to get back here, any minute longer.” Uncle replies to me and hands me the pocket watch. “Please, try to not lose it.”

“Do you need anything else?” Crimson asks me, what makes me feel his support and I appreciate it.

“Can I take one of your hoodies?” This makes him roll his eyes, but he hands me his black hoodie that's too big for me.

I crouch and close the lid. Before I close my eyes, I think about where I want to be teleported, but it doesn't take long.

*Deep in my heart I have known from the very beginning what this place is.*

I close my eyes and the last sentence I hear before teleporting to the chosen location is my grandmother starting to say a prayer.

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About a minute later I open my eyes and see that I am in some forest clearing. I get up from the ground and look around uncertainly.

On my right there is a building that looks like a chapel, and on the other side I see lots of small crosses sticking out of the ground. They look like a graveyard, which doesn't surprise me at all. Here and there there are trees, none of which have a single leaf. The sky is covered with clouds, making everything seem gray, dark and foggy.

*This is exactly how I always imagined the Land of Death.*

I chose this land because of Amarissa, but now I have no idea what to do next. Where could she be? How am I supposed to find her when all I see here are graves?

I decide it would be best to go to the chapel first rather than look for her among the gravestones. Heading in that direction, thanks to the silence there, I can clearly hear my footsteps. When I stop in front of the building, I notice a sign above the entrance:

**“Tempus fugit, aeternitas manet” [[2]](#footnote-1)**

The sign doesn't encourage you to enter, but I have no better option, so I go inside.

There was a candle burning by the entrance door, the only one in the room., which made it possible to see anything. In front of the post-conciliar altar there are six dark-wooden benches, arranged in three rows. On the wall opposite me, behind the altar, there are no nicely painted, elegant paintings, but only one black, large cross.

“Who is here?!” I suddenly hear a loud voice, and after a while I see its owner when he gets up from the bench in the front row, and I have to cover my mouth with my hand so as not to scream. He is a terribly tall, muscular man. “Who the fuck are you?!” He says, walking towards me and glaring at me. When he's a step away from me, I dare to look at his face, which turns out to be a mistake.

His skin is appalling light, which is contrasting with his black hair and eyes. He also has a square jaw, hollow cheeks and one of them has a large scar. He wears a black, tight-fitting shirt and a necklace made of bones. All of this together makes him look fearsome.

“I’m Narissa Lour…”

“I don't give a damn who you are, liar. You’re still alive, so what are you doing here, in my Land of Death?!” He shouts at me furiously. I don't know how to explain to him that I got here through a box. This sounds ridiculous.

“Okay, so… It may sound preposterous, but it’s true. Today is my eighteenth birthday and my uncle gave me a cardboard box and instructions as a gift. In short, it is a magic box that allows you to get anywhere you want. As you can see, it works.” I say, hoping that he will believe me since I told the truth.

“Wait, you're saying there are more boxes like this?” He says, sounding surprisingly calm compared to his attitude moments earlier. “I'm sorry, we started our companionship off on the wrong foot. I’m Dearil.” He says, extending his hand towards me. I blink in shock, not knowing what I should do, but I finally shake his hand.

“Nice to meet you, Dearil. Can I ask you a question?” I say uncertainly, because he intimidates me.

“Sure, ask about whatever you want.”

“How do you know about these boxes?” This issue has been bothering me ever since he mentioned them.

“It’s easy.” He says and starts laughing. “That's how I came here a few years ago.”

This news shocks me. I would never say that he didn't once belong to this land. He was born in the same world as me, maybe even in the same country.

*How long has he been living in this land? Who is he in this land? How old is he? Why didn't he come home?*

I have too many questions in my head that I want to ask him, but I don't have time. I'm here to find Amarissa and go home with her, that's all.

“Do you know where each soul is?” I ask him and he smiles in response.

“Of course, I'm the master here, so I need to know where everyone is. At least I know where the gravestone of every soul here is. Who exactly are you looking for?”

“I’m looking for Amarissa Stone. She died half a year ago, on August twenty-eighth, in Denver.” My voice breaks as I say this, it's still hard for me. I see compassion and understanding in Dearil’s eyes, for which I am somewhat grateful.

“Come with me.” He says and wants me to hold his hand, which I do.

We leave the chapel and walk towards the crosses located on the other side of the clearing. Dearil leads the way, pulling me behind him, so all I do is look in both directions, at the identical gravestones. Suddenly, after about five minutes, he stops abruptly, causing me to bump into his back.

“It’s here?” I’m asking, because I don’t see my best friend.

“Yes, if she is not in the chapel, she should be in her coffin.” He answers me, and after a while he says some sentences in Latin that I don't understand. After these words, the ground under our feet begins to tremble and the cross gleams delicately. This lasts a while, and then Amarissa appears before us in the form of a ghost translucent.

I always thought that there were souls in the land of death in the form of ghosts, but Dearil, who looked like a normal person, made me change my mind. So I'm quite surprised that he's probably the only one who looks like that.

“Hey Der, is there something important going on that makes you take me out during the day?” Her voice is beautiful and soothing as always, it makes me want to cry. I'm standing next to Dearil, that is, opposite her, and she doesn't seem to notice me. So why do I see her? “What's the matter? Why are you looking to the side like that? There's nothing there, calm down.”

“Oh, right, I forgot.” He says and snaps his fingers. This makes me see Amarissa and the shock on her face much more clearly. Before I can say anything, she's already hugging me.

“Oh my god, is that really you, Nari? God, I missed you so much.” She says through tears and when I hear it, I start crying too.

“I missed you too, Amari. I hate to say it, but it's good to see you, even if you're dead.” After these words, she steps away from me and looks at me seriously.

“Wait, what are you even doing here? You didn't die, did you?” Before I can answer her, Dearil speaks up.

“I know you haven't seen each other for a long time and you have a lot to talk about. But if you want to go home, you have to hurry. If I see correctly, you only have twelve hours left.” He says after looking at his necklace like it's a clock.

“What? How come there's only so much time left? I just got here a few minutes ago.” I say, not understanding him.

“Time flows differently here than in the real world. An hour there equals two minutes here. It doesn't matter, we just have to get back to the clearing, from where you can come back home.” He grabs my hand and pulls me back in the direction we came from, so I grab Amarissa and we catch up to him.

Because we run, we cover the road much faster. I hope that somehow Dearil knows how to teleport home, because my uncle forgot to explain it to me. I also wonder how my loved ones will react when I come home with Amarissa, who has been dead for half a year. Her aunt, who took care of her, committed suicide after her death, so she had no one to go to. I hope my parents will agree to let her live with us, at least until we find a better solution. I don't know how we'll explain to everyone that Amari is alive, but we'll deal with that later, when we get home.

“Alright, we’re there.” He says as we find ourselves in the very center of the clearing, the exact same spot where I landed here. “Did the person who gave you the box give you anything else? A key, a skull, a necklace or anything else?”

“I got the pocket watch” I reply, pulling it out of my back pocket and handing it to him.

“Could someone explain to me what this is all about? I don’t understand.” Amari says, but Dearil ignores her and directs his next words to me.

“Do you know if the box is still in the same place? It’s really important.”

“Definitely, I'm sure about that.” My mother definitely wouldn't have moved it before I got back.

In response to this he merely nods and turns the hands of the watch. Another question pops into my head and I know I have to ask it. The previous ones weren't worth wasting time, of which we didn't have much anyway, but I couldn't let this one go.

“Dearil, don't you want to come home with us?” When he hears these words, he looks up at me abruptly.

“You're really lovely for asking, but I can't. Someone has to take care of this land, and it's too risky.” He says, then looks back down at watch, but I can see the smile on his face.

Amarissa and I stand and wait, but we don't speak. There are many things I want to tell her, but none of them seem right right now. At home we will have time to catch up on these few months and she will have to tell me what her life was like here.

“Ready.” Dearil says, making me look at him. “You have nine minutes left, stay where you are standing and hold hands. You, Narissa, hold the watch in your other hand.” He says in a tone as if he were giving us orders.

I see Amarissa walk up to him and just hug him, which clearly surprises him, but he hugs her back.

“Some of your rules were annoying, just like you, but I will miss you, Der.” She says, moving away from him.

“I've only known you for a little over an hour, but I can see that you are a wonderful person. I'm grateful for your help, I couldn't cope here on my own.” I say, walking up to him and extending my hand towards him, but he hugs me tightly. We stand like that for a few seconds until he pulls me away to adjust his necklace.

“It’s for you.” Dearil says, giving both of us a bone from his necklace. “When you grab it in your hand and think that you would like to come back here, you teleport here. You are always welcome here.” He smiles, but after a while he adds “Now stand in your place.”

We fulfill his request and hold hands. When I close my eyes, I hear his quiet voice.

“If I could ask you a favor, could you stop by my mom's cafe in San Diego? If you type the word "skeleton" it should come up first. Please see how she is.” He asks us for it and I give him a smile and nod.

A few seconds later the world starts spinning before my eyes and the ground begins to shake.

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A moment later I open my eyes and see that Amari and I are in a box.

*We did it, everything went as we planned.*

I get up carefully and the first thing I see is my mother sitting on the couch and watching TV. When she notices me, she immediately walks towards me quickly. She takes my chin in her hand and looks at me carefully, then hugs me.

“You're fine, you don't even know how worried I was about you.” She says, but when we hear movement from the box, she stops and widens her eyes in surprise. “Amarissa? What's going on here, what are you doing here? how is this possible, you died.”

“Hey aunt, as you see, I have risen from the dead.” She laughs then walks over to us and hugs my mom. “Could I stay with you for just a few days? Until I find another plan.”

“Honey, don't worry about it. Of course you stay with us, there is no other option. I'm really glad you're alive, but what do we do about the legal issues?” She asks her and I laugh under my breath and say.

“No one needs to know that Amarissa is alive, she can be our secret.”

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*One week later*

I’m sitting with Amarissa in "Skeletor Blossom" and drinking green tea, watching an older woman who just walked in. I see her smiling at the waitress at the counter. She has black hair, hollow cheeks and smiles just like Dearil. When she looks at his photo hanging on the wall, I'm sure.

*She is his mom.*

I look at my best friend and we don't have to say a word because we are both thinking the same thing. We must visit the Land of Death again.

THE END.

1. Hogwart (Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry) is a fictional boarding school of magic for students aged eleven to eighteen in J. K. Rowling’s best-selling Harry Potter series. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Time flees, eternity remains. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)