

My only love,

I am sitting in the dark of the night as your breath claws out of you. You look like a goddess; it devastates me.

What am I to do if you are gone? How will I reconcile this with our child? Will you be able to return to this plane from the beyond? How can I exist without you by my side?

I shouldn't have let you go there alone. I should have listened when you told me to take a break. I should have cooked dinner like I said I would.

Reima suggested that this is a test of faith, that this will somehow help me become a better Successor. If this is true, why is it happening to you and not me? Why is He refusing to interfere?

They keep telling me that sickness and death are natural parts of life, inherent and necessary to the life we live. It's something I always accepted – but now I cannot.

Your hand feels so cold already, I can feel you slipping away with every heartbeat. I would do anything to see you smile, for you to get up and tell me it was all a dream. My love, please hang on a little longer. We will figure something out.

I can't lose you. I'd be a shell of a woman if you died. Please don't leave me alone, my love. Al needs you, I need you. Please just hang -

My only love,

Today is the day you return to the earth. Moment to ashen moment has pulled me here and I am not ready.

I helped dress you in your favourite tunic, the one that reminds me of the setting sun. Your lion's mane spills across the table and your curls glint in the early morning. Al is currently weaving flowers in your hair while sitting alongside your bow.

She hasn't spoken to anyone since that day. I hope that soon she will start to look us in the eyes again, that she won't walk away from His light. I wouldn't stop her if she did.

Tonight, I pray that you will meet me under the moonlight; I've taken to walking the grounds as the sun sets. I say it's to take the weight from Reima, but his silence says everything it needs to. In his way, I think he misses you, too.

It's time to leave. I'll hold your hand the whole way, my love.

My only love,

I thought I caught a glimpse of you last night, but the spirits of my kin have not seen you. Why do you not return here? Do you have important business on the other plane? I hope your ancestors welcomed you warmly and spread a great feast in your name.

I hope you feel comfortable now that you have been laid to rest. I'm sorry it took a little longer than usual, Mei, but we finally got it sorted out. Al got so frustrated she marched into a Council meeting herself – she was very fierce in her demands that you rest here. Standing there arguing, I couldn't shake this bittersweet déjà vu.

Will it always feel like this? Will I always be held in stasis, searching for you in every passing moment? Will each breath eventually stop rattling my ribcage? Will my soul rise once more?

We always knew that you would pass before me – but not like this. I wanted to hold you close through the decades and delight in your changes with you. To stroke your hand and step into each season together was all I ever wanted, to revel in Al's triumph and support her in sorrow. The thought of tomorrow crushes me in its loneliness.

I await your return to our glade – you rest facing the rising sun under the oak tree. Your stone has your full name on it, your parents insisted. The flowers are budding beautifully; coreopsis, your favourite. May the sun warm you as you become one with the earth, Meilin Enric.

Eternally yours,

Oliphina Enric