

Excerpt from Guiding Light (Fractured Memories Series) by A. Dalcourt
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The township of Mountain Crest was brimming with curious excitement. A dozen handpicked students from the Council's Academy had chosen their village as part of their historical tour, specifically to explore the Red Order Monastery. Common folks weren't allowed past the main place of worship, which made these children that much more special and subject to much speculation.

Shop owners opened extra early, preparing special displays and cleaning their storefronts in an effort to make their place of work as inviting as possible in hopes of attracting a wealthy patron or two. Handcrafted goods were all the rage in the capitol, and some locals did very well for themselves by meeting those lofty demands.

The shuttle arrived silently a little before eight in the morning. It was a little more than a long, slender oval shape with a metallic reflective surface which was intended to trick the demons into thinking that nothing was there. It had some aerodynamic properties, which increased its traveling speeds, but overall, it looked like a blob that was trying to take the shape of something truly majestic.

If the curious few who had gathered in the square had dared to touch the machine, it would have felt cold. Even in the desert, this particular model was designed to keep its outer shell cold, masking the heat signatures of those being transported inside. There were no obvious windows or doors until a few minutes after the quiet purr of the engine had stopped and a door slid open, revealing an older woman.

Mrs. Price was the class instructor for the day and was an avid historian. She had a fondness for ancient architecture dated just after the official beginning of the Demon War, some two hundred years prior. She had a rounded face which matched her rounded figure. She had a warm smile and soft brown eyes. Her hair, now wiry and grey, was cut to the desired heart shape and seemed content to obey.

She had hoped that exposure to the world outside of the safe zones established by the Council would enrich her student's lives and guide them to understand that the people in these small villages were human as well. By learning about the rich history of their ancestors, they might understand that superiority had nothing to do with their survival into this new age. Having lived the majority of her life during the oppressive Military Regime, Mrs. Price hoped to close the gap between the surface world and those who lived safely in the underground sanctuary of the capitol.

As she exited, the instructor searched for the first destination, and thus her first lesson for the day. One by one the students filed out, stretching after the two hour journey. This far North, winter still had a powerful hold over the region, and the students had been advised to dress accordingly.

Many of the dozen students chose to wear coats that were fashionable but otherwise useless for the climate. A handful wore heavy, sensible coats, possibly because they were related to, or were surface dwellers themselves. But one student seemed to take the warning of colder temperatures to an extreme.

Astral Daamon wore no less than three winter coats, four wildly colourful hats, three scarves wrapped around her head, nose, mouth, and neck, revealing only her piercing blue eyes. After much arguing about the school's dress code, she was obligated to wear her school uniform with the condition that she could wear trousers, and left behind the long underwear, heavily padded winter boots, and two wool sweaters. She wore gloves beneath the bright red mitts.

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The other students left her a wide berth, afraid to acknowledge the eccentric fifteen year old who moved towards an aroma that promised a delicious breakfast.

“This way,” Mrs. Price called to her flock as she led them to the restaurant where they would be dining.

Astral slipped behind the restaurant and kept an ear out for spies. She pulled the pen apart, wide enough to reveal the full message. To anyone reading it, it would have been another ordinary letter from a concerned guardian to his ward, prompting that she be extremely careful and to stay close to her group.

She removed her mitten and glove to touch her bare finger to her grand-father’s signature. A new message appeared from Lord Leon, the Council’s leader and founding father.

She read:

Astral Daamon, esteemed Hunter of the Council.

Astral narrowed her eyes at the word esteemed; it was going to be one of those dangerous missions where, if she was caught, she’d have to deny the Council’s involvement. She read on.

Your Mission should you choose to accept,

She arched a brow. Why did they imply that she had a choice? She’d have to accept the mission or deal with a permanent blemish on her civil record, which had its own series of side effects.

She had to press the accept button before she could retrieve the briefing. She thought it was a cop out. She’d like to know what the mission was before she chose to accept it, but that’s not how these things worked. They were orders, plain and simple.

Lord Leon’s face appeared on her view finder. The video waited as she took the formerly flashing nib and put it into her ear. She touched the screen, signalling that she was ready for the transmission.

“It has come to our attention that members of the Red Order are participating in occult activities. At this time, we are not sure of the truthfulness of the allegations, nor are we certain of the depth of their involvement.

“I’ve chosen you for this task on account of your experience with this particular faction whose involvement we suspect caused the disaster in Clear Water during your father’s brief stay. We trust that your father may have relayed information with regards to their activities to you during that time. Given that you have thwarted their plans at such a tender age, mind you at great expense to yourself, we humbly ask that you carry on in your father’s stead.

If we are correct, it is your duty to ascertain their source and retrieve it, or if living and of demon origin, eliminate it.”

He paused, breaking his formal request. He lowered his voice as though talking to a friend.

“Townships in the vicinity of the Eternal Dawn Monastery have reported a recent hike in missing persons.” He paused again, as though giving her time to digest the information. He was right to assume that she knew what this meant. It was one of the reasons why she and her father had travelled to Clear Water in her early

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childhood. "You'll report to Master Mathers with regards to the artifact. You will report directly to me on all other matters when the opportunity presents itself."

Leon concluded in a worried tone, "Child, do be careful."

- See more at: <http://www.awakeninganthology.com/Fractured-Memories/Volume-i/Guiding-Light#sthash.Wx9yARPi.dpuf>