

Sunshine,

It has always been my goal to make others smile. My father, Willem Verbosa, noticed this in me when I was a toddler. I had this funny dance I would do that could make even the sourest old folks laugh. I'd do it until my knees gave out, just to hear the laughter. It's really no surprise. My old man was Willem the Wondrous, traveling musician and comedian, before I was born. I get it from him. I might also have something from my mother, but I never really knew her.

What I do know is that my father met her when he was touring Taliana. She's an elf, he's a human. I was born 30 years ago and my father took me away from her almost as soon as I was born. He quit being an entertainer and settled down as a farmer. My old man will talk for hours about anything, adventures he's had, books he's read, places he's performed, even other women in his past, but I cannot get him to say a word about my mother. I don't know her name, I don't know where she lives in Taliana. I probably wouldn't even know she was an elf if it weren't for my pointy ears.

Growing up in the seaside farm town of Maldwyn was a pleasant, but utterly boring affair. As I grew older, I yearned to leave the sleepy village and have adventures like the ones my father spoke of. I could tell he missed traveling too, but he always said he needed me on the farm to help harvest lettuce and asparagus, to tend chickens, but I think the truth was the old man didn't want me in any danger. All that changed on my 16th birthday.

I had been begging my old man to give me his lute. He kept it locked up in a trunk and barely played it. Well on that special birthday not only did he give me my very own brand new lute, he took out his and started to teach me to play. When I struck that first chord, it was magic. Literally. A burst of green sparks came off the strings! My father's eyes widened. I'll never forget it. "Ramus, you have a gift, my boy. One that only a lucky few have. You can make magic through music. So can I." With that, Dad strummed his lute and created a wave of thunder that blew our cups and plates to pieces.

For the next ten years, my father and I hit the road. Willem the Wondrous and his son, Famous Ramus, traveled all over Aeranore and Marrial. He was careful to avoid booking gigs in Taliana. My father helped me hone my musical prowess, singing songs both tragic and comedic. We worked on my comedic timing and on my spells. It wasn't long before my insults could literally kill and my compliments inspired others to greatness. During these gigs, my father would look for another kind of work. I'll never forget my first "off-stage job" as he called it.

My father and I were staying at the Marigold Inn in Periath when old Fenton Marwhistle, the innkeeper, took my father aside and handed him a bag of coins. It was more than we'd normally get for a performance. A lot more. Dad explained Fenton needed a bit more than music and laughs from us. An unsavory crew of smugglers was staying in his rooms upstairs, refusing to pay. That was my first run-in with the Rainbow Dragons.

It wasn't known like it is now that the orange spice peddlers were turning the whole town into a dangerous gangland. My father and I blasted them with thunder and song, charming and driving them from the inn, until we reached the final room. My old man kicked in the door and two hulking zombies made their way toward us. We weren't expecting undead! Turns out one of the Rainbow Dragons, the very one staying in that room, was a necromancer. Xia Di was a crafty witch.

My father pushed passed the undead, told me to deal with them while he drew his rapier to take on the wizard. My opponents didn't respond to magic charms. Their gray skin and dead eyes barely registered my arrows. As the monsters drew close I stabbed again and again with my dagger while moving back. One fell after many cuts, but the other had me pinned at the end of the hall. As the beast threw me down the stairs, I marveled at its power. It was dead and yet stronger and more resilient than any living person.

I was still coming to at the foot of the stairs when the zombie got destroyed. My old man heard me screaming and left his fight with Xia to come to my rescue. His rapier was in the zombie's chest as it crumpled in a heap. Then she appeared! I called to my father, but Xia's lightning brought him down. I thought he was dead. She stepped right over my old man's body and made her way down the steps toward me. The tip of her knife pressed into my neck while she smiled. "You and your father will be excellent replacements for the servants you've cost me," she whispered.

Thank the gods for Dad. That tough son of an owlbear was on her before the knife cut too deep. He threw himself right down the steps, landing on her back, knocking the knife away and her fist knocking into my mouth. I bit down as hard as I could. Took off two of the fingers on her right hand. We fought like animals. Fists, bites, and hair-pulling. Eventually she ran off into the night, swearing up and down that she'd make us her slaves one day. It was a heck of an "off-stage job." I've still got a scar on my neck where she got me.

After that encounter, I decided to read up about all the creatures and cultures of the world whenever I could. I had never seen a zombie and I had never encountered the Rainbow Dragons, but if I had known a little something about them, maybe it would have saved us some trouble. When I wasn't performing or practicing, I was reading.

As I got older, so did Dad. After a decade of travelling together, he told me he was too old to keep it up and went back to the farm in Maldwyn. I was solo for a time after that. Being Famous Ramus on my own was an exciting, lonely life. It wasn't until I was passing through Oliath's Pinpoint Gin Joint that I met another bard. Maryn Avoss, The Laughing Enchantress, the most beautiful, most kind, and most talented human, or any other creature, I laid eyes on. Red hair, green eyes, and a voice that could make a dragon weep. All that and one of the bawdiest senses of humor I've ever encountered! For me, this was the total package. We hit it off in the Pinpoint that night and I followed her to Bladeward. Then she followed me to Highvale. It

seemed wherever one of us was going the other would follow. Eventually we were taking “off-stage jobs” together as well.

After three years of that, we got married by the cliffs of Vacurion, where she was from. My old man made the trip and said marrying Maryn was the smartest thing I had ever done. I agreed.

Maryn and I kept touring. The Laughing Enchantress and Famous Ramus. We’d say hello to her folks and younger sister whenever we were in Vacurion and to my old man whenever we were in Maldwyn. We even made it into Taliana a few times, where Dad had never taken me. That’s where I burned Granny Darkvow.

We met Thales at the Pirate’s Pleasure Tavern in Doma. I can still remember the exact day and year because Maryn was pregnant with our first child for seven months. We had been telling everyone this was our last tour for a bit, since we were both going to stay at our place in Highvale with the baby after the birth.

Anyway back to Thales. The odd human was a kind soul, kept calling himself a “hero wizard,” but I was pretty damn sure he was some kind of warlock. He had this way about him of asking questions with some pretty obvious answers, but I applaud that kind of curiosity. Knowledge can save you time, money, and in some cases your life. Still he seemed naive. When he told Maryn and I that he was going out into the hills around the city to tangle with Granny Darkvow, a night hag, we thought it best he have back up.

I had read about night hags, but text was a poor excuse for the real deal. The horrifying thing was boiling a pot of water over a huge bonfire when we found her. She was boiling up a few elf shepherds had stolen in the night. Granny Darkvow immediately took Thales down with a blast of black magic that made him weak as an empty sack. It was what she did next that still haunts me.

I could have told Maryn to stay back, that she was pregnant, but she wouldn’t have listened. What right did I have to tell her that anyway? I still wish I had tried. We ran at the hag together as the monster opened some magic sack made of elf skin. A black blast of magic came out of the sack. Why she hit Maryn and not me, I’ll never know. That magic took something out of my wife and placed it in the sack. When Maryn went down, I thought it was just the same spell that had knocked out Thales. If I had known, if I had read more, I would have done something instead of what I did next.

I barrelled hard into Granny Darkvow. She and her bag flew right into the bonfire that was boiling those poor elves. The flames ate the hag and the bag. I turned victorious to my wife and new ally. All I saw was horror on Thales’ face as he regarded Maryn. Her eyes were open, but there was no life in them. She breathed, but it was as a gnome’s machine at work - ever unchanging. Thales, weakened, struggled to Maryn’s side as I cast every spell of healing I could on her alive, but lifeless form. Nothing would stir her.

I later learned Granny Darkvow had ripped out my wife's soul with her magic bag. Though her soul is gone, Maryn somehow lives. I burned the bag. I do not know where Maryn's soul went. Did I destroy it? Is it on some other plane of existence? Can I call it back into her? I burned the bag. I did that to her.

Thales is the only other person who knows what truly happened. He helped me take Maryn's body back to our cottage in Highvale without anyone else asking questions. No one thought much of us not traveling anymore and I told all our friends and relations that Maryn needed to be at rest because the baby was coming. Only Thales, not my father, not Maryn's family, knows of my terrible mistake.

The baby never came. It is still within Maryn, but I do not know the child's fate either. She and the baby are in our marriage bed... one without a soul... the other unborn and status unknown. After months of staying inside, crying, furiously reading my books for answers, I saw that nothing in the house could help me undo my horrid handiwork. I sent word to Thales. I was going on tour again and needed a traveling companion. The odd human seemed to be on a quest for knowledge and so was I. I remembered the zombies. Their lifeless forms were strong. Some dark magic powered them, similar to the dark magic that took Maryn's spirit. Searching for information on the undead seemed like as good a start as any.

I will find a way to bring your mother's soul back, my child. If I die trying, Thales has promised to continue this quest and deliver this letter when it is completed, so you know of your father.

All of my love,
Ramus Verbosa