

One Thousand Young
By Astra Ebonwing / Matron Mystery

The girl looked out the window at her only friends, the twinkling stars. She turned her head and coughed again, a small droplet of blood oozing from the side of her mouth. Her hand weakly dotted the side with her handkerchief, cleaning up the red stain and adding it to the other spatters of crusted brown that marred its surface.

Ravena's blue eyes could barely focus as the pain wracked her body again. The priest of Sarenae's magics had dulled her senses for only two hours this time. Each time the effects of the blessing had less and less effect. The disease that ravaged the poor girl's body was relentless in its pursuit of her flesh. Black veins ran over the top of her chest, only being hidden from the candlelight of the room by her red nightgown.

"Another night for just us," she whispered to the sky. Ravena knew her state was getting worse. Since its onset six years ago, no one had been able to identify the disease. Not the doctors, not the clerics, not the paladins, not the sorcerers, not the priests. The best minds of Raven's Bluff and beyond, all dumbfounded to what could slowly be eating her away. They never gave her a prognosis, but they didn't have to say it aloud. Time was running out. All she could do was wait for something to give, one way or another.

She slowly rolled her head, the stiff muscles in her neck fighting every centimeter of its turn. She had propped her latest book on a music stand at the side of her luxurious sheets. With a slight flick from her hand she flipped it to the last page. She had been putting it off for the last hour because she didn't want it to end. As long as the book didn't stop, she didn't have to be alone. But all things come to an end, whether she liked it or not.

Her eyes scanned the last page, taking in the ancient text. To many, it was completely incomprehensible. To Ravena, it was just another book to join the pile of many that lay around the wooden floor. When you have almost infinite time on your hands, you can learn anything. The titles of the books ran the gamut of subjects: "Modern Engineering" by Gutka Ironbeard, "Forgotten Languages of Varisia and Beyond" by Shaleth Wyrdley, "A Compendium of Religions" by Sister Lailla Taylia, "Artistry for Beginners," by Cardinal Adrianna Starswan, and the piles went on. Every word a sacrament to her sunken eyes. Every sentence a world she could use to escape this one.

The shouting downstairs began again. She could hear her father and mother arguing with another, higher-pitched feminine voice. Her handmaid, Camille, must have delivered her request to her parents, Count and Countess Tourmalenzia. She could guess the results.

By the time the voices stopped and the footsteps came up the stairs she had knocked the book off of the stand and let it thump to the floor. The heavy wooden door creaked open and another candle entered the room. Ravena didn't look. She just lay on her pillow and moved her head to look out the window again. She watched as the stars stared back at her and she sighed.

"Ravena, I'm sorry to tell you this, but they rejected your request despite your detailed plans and

proposal. The budget, they say, is out of the question. No experimental treatment is worth the cost that you provided, in their eyes,” the black haired woman in the maid’s dress informed her. The maiden’s head hung down as she spoke the words as if she was too scared to make eye contact with the weakened woman.

“So that’s the way it is then,” Ravena croaked. “Rikard and Gertrude prize gold and platinum over my life.”

“They don’t want to risk their position on the council. They say that the cost would lower the House’s net worth below the threshold to hold a seat. Trading during the winter has been slower than normal. We’ve gotten reports that caravans are being lost upon the icy roads.”

“Accidents?”

“Highwaymen, Miss Ravena.”

“Tch.” Ravena closed her eyes and slowly breathed in, forcing her lungs to take what oxygen they could. “Can you bring me my favorite book?”

“Yes ma’am, is it still on the shelf?”

“Of course. It is too precious for me. I had the priest put it back in its usual spot when he left. I’d like to read it before falling asleep again.”

Camille nodded and slowly made her way to one of the many bookshelves that lined the wood paneled room. Thick, rich tapestries of the house sigil adorned the walls. Toys that she had once played with as a younger child were left discarded in the corner by the door, dust thick on their wood, cobwebs hanging from the strings and joints. Camille had wanted to throw them into the trash, but Ravena never let her move them. Perhaps the memories of what once was soothed her.

The maid already knew where to go. Third shelf, center of the stack, facing forward. She wrapped her fingers around the thick tomb and took it back to the music stand. The broken and cracked black leather cover faced forward towards Ravena, its golden words sparkling in the low light of the room: “Facies In Vicipaedia.” No author. The binding was barely holding.

“Are you staying the night in the manor, Camille?” Ravena asked.

“No ma’am. I will be at the Raven’s Call again. Wickford will be staying this evening.”

Ravena’s eyes slid over to look at her face. Even with the light being what it was, she could see the purple bruise already forming over the woman’s eye. Father’s temper made manifest.

“Thank you for your services, Camille, you have always been good to me. I cannot give you enough back. I wish I could give you what you deserve,” Ravena whispered as the maid bent down to give her a good night kiss.

“Perhaps one day you will, ma’am,” she replied with a weak smile.

Camille left and the quiet in the room was deafening. Ravena reached over and grabbed the long ribbon that marked one of the pages. She tugged at it and flipped the book open, revealing the thin script, the ink stained pages, and the indescribable diagrams filled with runes that leaked down the paper. They filled her heart with joy.

“Kul’eh ta nagath, akta sha Yuggoth,” she whispered to the night.

Her eyes closed as the void whispered back.

In her dreams her body hung in the void, the cold light of the stars surrounding her. Time was endless here. Gravity was a myth. She knew she was dreaming again. A tear fell down her face as she finally felt unshackled from her bed. She’d soon hear the voice that called to her from beyond the stars.

“Io! Io! Gah'nagl fhtagn kn'a Yuggoth lw'nafa phlegth-or!” she called out to the dark.

“Io! Io! Gof'nn hupadgh!” the dark whispered back. The voice was always multi-layered. Masculine. Feminine. All at once. The syllables blended together with a growl and whisper, their tones like music to her ears. She smiled and felt at ease. She always wished to wrap her arms around her friend, her God and Goddess-in-one. No one ever spoke to her like they. They cared about her well-being. They were the anchor she always lacked.

“I walk in the woods for you, my lover. I give my womb to you, my King. I give my seed to you, my Queen. I welcome into my body your young. I praise the blessing of the One Thousand Beyond. Io, io, my Black Goat.”

“Pul'krthla wqbla-ka vep shaqulathia qet bl'shopk. Yakalwh'ka btyqptieth.”

Ravena’s eyes went wide. The words shook her tonight. Was it... did they just say...

“Tonight?” she asked back.

“Yes, h' ah.”

She quivered. She spread her legs open, exposing her feminine folds. Her nightgown had left her in this realm, as her friend only wished to see her true form. They were not afraid to look at her disease-ridden body. They did not discard her like Rikard and Gertrude. Tonight she would be welcomed and embraced. It was time.

She felt the cold, wet strand of flesh before she saw it. The tentacle and its many mouths wrapped around her foot and began to spiral upwards. Tongues licked across the back of her

leg as the black thing wrapped around her thin thigh. Her hands reached down and spread her lower lips in glee. She never felt anything so wonderful, so romantic before. The tip wiggled upon her clit and she gasped, relaxing herself.

The black thing pushed inside of her, writhing as it did so. Her hips jostled and bucked as her inner muscles parted and pulsed around it, hugging it and caressing it. A low moan escaped her lips and it was joined by a chorus of others around her.

“Io! Io!” Her call.

“Io! Io!” The response.

She moved against it, pushing it in further. A few teeth cut her insides, blood leaking down and out before it was lapped up by an excited, forked tongue. Ever onwards it moved in. Her fingers rubbed one of its lips before it found the nose of a goat. She rubbed it and it breathed on her, tickling her.

The tentacle began to thrust and she moved with it. The act was an ethereal dance in the heavens themselves. Pleasure began to radiate from her core, a tingling building up below.

“More,” she croaked.

“Yes.”

She felt the fluid beginning to build up inside of her vagina. The mouths spit as the tongues lapped her juices and red liquid of life. As the process continued she felt herself begin to leak a little. Mixed with the blood was something else -- a thick white ooze that dripped between her legs. She groaned and rubbed her stomach.

The black veins that once mapped her body began to fade away. Her matted brown hair, thick with the refuse of dried sweat, dust, and dirt began to unfurl itself. From the core of her scalp came a slow color shift as brown gave way to a color as white as snow. Her hair floated between the stars, light twinkling from between the strands. The wave overtook the hair and began to curl it into a formal cut fit for a queen. This is what she wanted. Acceptance. Love. Pleasure. Life.

“More.”

“Yes.”

Her skin began to glow with a healthy shine. That’s when she felt the fat began to build up in her chest. She felt her once slack breasts perk up, her pink nipples darkening. Ravena reached up and traced her areola. The pain was gone from her muscles. She could move like she once could as a child without fear. But she was no longer a child, she was a woman, and she finally had someone treat her like one. An intelligent creature capable of great things.

The skin below her navel began to tighten. She felt her womb stretch as it filled with the milk that was being pumped inside. She smiled and gasped, rubbing this new area of her body with glee. What started as a bump grew into a bulge. She massaged it, pressing her fingers against the skin and feeling it squish in return. The bump began to move upwards towards her belly button, growing by the second.

Her thin form gained weight. Her hips blossomed. She felt healthy and warm as the tentacle slipped in and out of her, more white fluid leaking down her legs like spring dew upon a flower. It glistened in the starlight and she scraped her fingernails against it to gather it upon her hands. She brought it to her mouth and gave it a lick, letting the sweetness play across her tongue.

“More.”

“Yes.”

Her belly fattened up, a slight roll briefly forming before it was pushed out by what was inside. Her breasts inched forward, no longer bee stings but a healthy B-cup that swelled with pride. They began to shake as she kept thrusting, nipples bouncing in the night. They were so hard, she thought. The tension of the skin began to slightly ache as the rings around them continued to grow with the skin.

Her fingers, wrapped around her stomach, began to pull apart. More weight was added to her frame. She had curves, real curves, just like Camille, just like Gertrude! She was no longer the waif in the bed but the lover of the beyond. The receptacle for the holy milk. Her belly began to dome and take on the teardrop shape of motherhood. She knew she was pregnant. She knew she was with young.

She pleaded in her mind to keep growing and her body complied. Her stomach swelled from three months, to four months, to five months. The trimesters worked their way around her body and her thighs swelled, her butt filled. A few teeth bit at her legs as she moaned.

“More.”

“Yes.”

Another tentacle appeared from the void. This one played briefly with her growing breasts before she caressed it and welcomed it upon her bosom. She slipped it into her cleavage and pushed her boobs around it with the sides of her arms, letting it slide up and down her chest and drool on her neck. She licked it back and kissed it lovingly, so eager to feel the touch of her lover. Her white flesh continued to swell around the thing, locking it up behind a prison of skin. Her nerves were taken by the waves of tension that emanated from her clit and vagina.

Fatter she grew. Her belly was unmistakably pregnant. That’s when she felt the first kick from under her skin. It landed just on the side above her hips, an indentation barely noticeable to any but her. Her children were becoming bigger, she thought. She only wished for them to be as healthy as she was now and not scarred by the disease that once resided in her body. She

looked down and watched her stomach continue to rise as her breasts continued to fill up further and further. The tits slapped against her stomach as she shook and twisted, rocking in time to the pumping that was going on below. The feeling of her skin shaking and quivering like this was delightful.

An eye blinked against her chest balloons and tickled her. The second tentacle was giving her a titty fuck that a man could only dream of. It wrapped around her neck and she kneaded her breasts. They felt heavier, despite the lack of gravity. She cried tears of joy as the cells within them reacted and began to produce liquid. Milk for her beautiful babies, she thought. She needed to feed them after they were born with something as fruitful and as delicious as her. Nothing else would do.

Her hips widened out and began to cradle her growing stomach. Two more kicks landed, one against her lungs and one against her intestines. Her organs were shifting inside to make way for what was growing. She knew her young needed the room. She wanted them to take it all. Push her outwards and give her what she deserved.

“More.”

“Yes.”

Her hands moved back down to her belly, releasing her breasts and the tentacle alike. Her stomach pushed up against her tits, giving them a makeshift shelf to sit upon as they expanded. Her thighs grew and put pressure on the lower tentacle as it slid around, wet and messy as it spat more milk inside of her. Change her. Grow her. Make her whole, she thought.

Her eyes were sparkling as she watched herself change into a fully maternal woman. Her belly stuck out like a basketball and still it grew on her frame. She felt a writhing within her as her children began to stir and gain consciousness. She didn't know how many she was carrying, but she didn't care. Any number was a welcome addition. Anything that kept her from being so lonely and so forgotten ever again.

Her breasts felt tight, the pressure was building. A small trickle of liquid began to drip from the right before it began to drip from the left. She swelled with pride as her breasts swelled passed the size of soccer balls. She reached up and gave them a squeeze, sending milk onto her belly. She was mesmerized by her transformation, eyes lighting up with a sadistic glee.

“More.”

“Yes.”

Her motions were reaching a fever pitch. The second tentacle wrapped entirely around her throat and up towards her mouth. She licked it as pleasure over took her body, sending constant shocks through her nerves. She was so close, she thought. She kissed the tentacle as it caressed her. It kissed her back.

The bottom tentacle picked up the pace. It began pushing more and more. Her belly exploded outwards, inch by inch, jumping each time another pulse moved through the tentacle. She was the chalice, the receptacle for this holy gift.

Her hands moved to wrap around her newfound girth. She could barely reach around her bloated form. Everything was shaking inside of her, from her womb to her breasts, to her thighs. Ripples appeared on her skin from within her. So many children were waking up. They pushed outwards against her, bumps appearing all over as the pumping continued.

She began to scream in delight, laughing wildly. "More, more, more, more, go, go, go, go," she chanted, feeling the peak coming on. She was on the edge. She was so big. She was so fertile. Her lover was more than she could ever dream of. She gave everything she had to them, as they had stood by her side where others did not.

When the final orgasm came, everything in her body tense. The muscles around her stomach froze up, contracting against her young. She could see the snake like things that writhed inside of her. Her lover's milk gushed from her lower lips. The tentacle writhed with her, licking and blinking inside. She screamed and her delight echoed in the void.

Her body fell limp, hanging there with her beach ball sized stomach thrust out into the air, breasts leaking like sparkling rivers of life down onto her skin. The tentacles began caressing all the parts of her body, kissing, nipping, hugging. They welcomed her as one of their own.

"I... am... perfect..." she panted. "Io, io, my lover, my goat."

"Io, io, gof'nn hupadgh..."

She wished this dream would never end, but she was needed elsewhere.

The door to Ravena's room opened with a start. The finely dressed thin, balding man came stomping in for the first time in what seemed like ages. Ravena barely recognized her own father, it had been so long.

Camille bowed to her master from Ravena's bedside, having just turned the thin, weak girl over to avoid bedsores. Ravena's face looked directly at him as he approached the two of them, tracing his every move.

"Count Tourmalenzia, welcome. I will leave you two to your discussion," Camille politely announced, bowing once more before exiting the room.

Rikard stood in the middle of the room by one of the bookcases, tracing his finger across the spines. "So. I came. As you requested, Ravena." He glanced over at his daughter and frowned. "Disease destroy your hair finally? You look like shit."

The woman brushed one of the locks of her dirty white hair out of her face, a smile slathered across her lips. "And you look old, Rickard. But I asked you... nay... demanded you come up and tell me why you have rejected my plea. You want me up. You want me working. This is the path to do that."

Rickard scoffed. "Not at that price. Not to pay for a... whatever you call it... a theoretical contraption for a wretched, spoiled invalid like you."

"You could have your daughter back."

"I. Have. No. Daughter," he spat. "I have a bedridden invalid that is a drain on my resources. A plague ridden bitch who would do nothing more than limp around, even if this thing was created. You cannot produce anything, not trade nor child. You are nothing to this family. Nothing."

She giggled in response and he finally turned to her, one of his gray eyebrows cocked. He adjusted the cravat hanging down under his shirt, resuming his stately stance. She stirred, rolling a bit more so she could aim her eyes directly at his body.

"Then don't be a coward, father. Come over here, and say that to my face. Tell me you reject me like the man you claim yourself to BE."

Rickard's fist clenched. His body tensed. He stomped in his boots across the wooden floor to the bed, bending down to stick his face directly in hers. She could taste his breath; he was so close.

His hand raised high in the air above her as his face stayed put. "You are not my daughter. You have not been my daughter for years. You are a waste of flesh and you need to just hurry up and die."

"You first."

His eyes went wide. A gurgling down escaped his lips. Blood dripped on Ravena's face. The dagger she had hidden under the sheets had found its mark: His carotid artery. She pulled the dagger down and ripped out his windpipe, sending blood raining down across the sheets.

She weakly pulled her arm around his neck and pulled him close, laying his bleeding neck across her flat chest. She rubbed her hand across his thin hair, staining it with his blood. He was helpless. All he could do was stare into her eyes as she looked down at him.

"You left. The void didn't. Io, io, Shub-Niggurath wgah'nagl fhtagn. All honor to the All-In-One. All honor to the Black Goat of the Woods with One Thousand Young. I am baptized," she whispered to him.

As his breathing stopped she began to scream. Her wild passion filled the room and leaked out into the house. The footsteps came running up the grand staircase outside quickly, the fear already setting into the movement of the responder.

Gertrude burst into the room, swinging the doors wide open. Necklace upon necklace, ring upon ring complimented her shimmering red dress and black half-coat. She ran to the bedside, seeing the blood falling over the edge like a waterfall as her husband continued to bleed out.

“No... no no no! What happened WHAT HAPPENED!” Ravena’s mother screamed in horror. She got to the bed and flipped his limp body over, seeing the trickling red smile cut deeply across his throat. Her eyes darted to the bloodsoaked dagger lying on the sheets. Ravena’s screams turned into wild laughter.

“What... what did you... WHAT DID YOU DO YOU MONSTER?! YOU BITCH, HOW DARE YOU TAKE HIM! HOW DARE YOU TAKE MY LIFE FROM ME! YOU’VE RUINED US!”

Ravena attempted to pick up the dagger and dart it into her mother’s stomach, but Gertrude was faster. She caught her daughter’s hand mid-act and twisted it, easily breaking her anorexic wrist with a snap. The dagger clattered to the floor.

Gertrude’s hands reached up for Ravena’s throat, bloody hands wrapping around under her chin. She pressed down, tears in her eyes, teeth grit. “WHAT HAVE YOU DONE!” she continued to scream. Ravena just laughed wildly before she began to choke, her mother’s thumbs pressing down on her windpipe and denying her air. Yet despite the pain, the grin on her face never left. Her eyes rolled back in her head as her body was shaken up and down, again and again.

In a blink, the situation changed. Gertrude’s fury abated and her grip loosened. Wind flowed back into Ravena’s lungs. Camille’s arm had wrapped around the woman’s chest, another dagger was plunged directly into her heart. She didn’t even get a chance to scream as life left her, blood barely visible as it pooled and spread across her red dress.

Camille dumped the body off to the side, letting it crack against the floor. She took a single deep breath in before wiping the blade on her white apron, sending neat red streaks across the front.

“Perfectly executed, Miss Tourmalenzia,” Camille commented.

Ravena sighed happily as she continued to recapture her breath. She wiped the blood away from her mouth, but only succeeded in spreading it further across her cheeks. “I assume as you gave me the dagger, the Barrister agreed to my terms?”

“Yes. The will has been quietly amended and the Raven’s Bluff seal has been replaced. No one will ever know the difference. I checked it myself. His work was perfect.”

“Good. We are free, my friend. We are free. All of us. You, me, the staff, the traders. I will never do to you what Rickard did. Never. You are my family now.”

Camille bent down and grabbed Ravena’s limp hand carefully, kissing it lightly and letting the blood settle across her mouth. “Thank you... Countess Ravena Tourmalenzia.”

“It’s Astrea now, Camille. Astrea Tourmalenzia. I am my own person, and no other can determine my name.”

“Of course, Astrea. Should I send for the Dwarven engineers, as you planned?”

“Please, friend. Give them the schematics.”

Ravena’s eyes flickered open and she saw the top of her tent. The crickets outside continued to chirp in the darkness, but her tent was warm and lit.

“Oh, good, you’re awake Astrea. I’m so sorry to stir you, but Silver and Robinson wanted to get an early start. We have a while to go until Waterdeep,” the light, shy voice told her.

Astrea Tourmalenzia slowly rolled herself over and began to push herself up out of her bed. Her gravid, huge belly sat on top of her wide hips, nightgown barely covering her full form. She adjusted the cloth a bit, moving her breasts so they lay a bit more evenly over her stomach. Black veins still mapped her skin, and red splotches of small sores were still dotting her pale skin.

“Did you sleep at all Medea? Or did you just use that trick ring of yours again?” Astrea asked, batting the sleep from her eyes. She slowly began to focus on the odd, green woman sitting on the stool across from her cot. The sparkling of the snake scales across her face always caught her attention. When they had first met, she was half-elf. Now, as more flesh fell off, her true race was becoming more and more apparent with each passing day. What a glorious mutation. One of these days she would get time to study it.

“Trick ring,” Medea happily chimed, standing up and grabbing the pouch of metal tools from the back of the tent. “Where do you want me to start this morning?”

Astrea tugged at the buttons on her nightgown, slowly pulling it off. Her left fattened breast rested on her stomach, while the right had been partially encapsulated in brass. The further down she went, the more machinery that was exposed. The skin of her sides was pulled and bolted around the orb that dominated her middle -- a round brass contraption that could easily be passed off for a pregnancy when she donned her clothing. Runes, etched across the front of the dome, glowed lightly in the tent. She checked the readout and saw which notifications were lit as her hands instinctively massaged her core, despite being unable to feel anything from the metal.

Wires ran up from her stomach along her right side and stuck into her flesh to pierce into her heart, keeping the beat stable. Piping attached to the underside of the stomach reached back around into her spine, sending a spider web of wires and smaller pipes that circulated fluid into her body. She moved her legs a few times, checking the metal joints that reinforced her muscles. The flexible piping surgically inserted into her thighs and hips felt as stable as ever.

She smiled at her friend as morning maintenance began. "Could you check the bolt near capacitor output number three, please? Feels a little loose, despite the core reading normal." she asked, turning her back towards Medea.

"Yep, let me just get the socket wrench..." Medea murmured, searching in the leather bag. With a slight "ah ha," the serpentine woman pulled out the socket wrench and turned to Astrea's back, planting the piece onto one of the exposed pieces of the frame that ensured stability. A few long pipes trailed out of her tailbone, dripping a black fluid every once in a while down onto the ground. She always kept long dresses on to ensure they were never seen.

Astrea felt the cold tool meet her back and she sighed as Medea began struggling. "Medea, darling, that's capacitor two."

"Sorry! I'll get this right one day."

A few moments later, Medea emerged from the tent and to the middle of the camp as the others were packing their things up. The sun was just beginning to rise and she took in a deep breath of the fresh morning air.

"Is Astrea all set, Medea? Everything fixed up?" the armored paladin asked in her high pitched, quiet voice. She clapped her gauntlets on her hips, letting the wind blow her blonde hair around her elven ears as she looked towards the small, young witch.

"I am just perfect, my serious, holy friend," Astrea laughed as she emerged from the tent. Her flowing red hoop skirt slightly dragged along the grass. Her modified maternity blouse sat comfortably around her wide middle, buttoned all the way up to her neck to hide the brass collar that kept the piping attached to her arteries. Her red cravat blew slightly in the wind as she limped forward, foot making deep imprints in the wet dirt. With each step she leaned on her ornate metal cane, slowly making her way to the group as they continued to pack up around her.

"Cane all ready, Astrea? We may have some resistance today. Lady of the Unseeing Eyes is probably going to make an attempt today."

"Well that's expected," she replied as she placed her wide-brimmed, feathered hat upon her curled white hair. "But the bitch isn't going to kill herself after all, is she? If only that could be our luck. Also, it's not a *cane*, Silver. It's Reaper's March."

The paladin sighed, closing her eyes and shaking her head. "Fine. Is Reaper's March ready?"

Astrea curled her fingers around the hilt, twisting it and ejecting a metal trigger into the curve of the handle. She pulled the long cylinder up and checked the barrel, reviewing each cartridge to ensure it was fire-ready. With a quick pull, she locked the barrel and loaded the next round into the chamber with a loud click.

"Locked and loaded."

Silver nodded in response. "Good. I'll help Robinson finish your tent. Olithir is over by the carriage. Join him when you're ready."

"Perfect."

Countess Astrea Tourmalenzia watched as the sun rose over the edge of the horizon. She smiled to herself as the wind pushed her hair back, and she whispered her holy prayer into the wind.

"Io, io, Shub-Niggurath, my Goat."

No one but her noticed the barren tree in the distance began to quiver, its branches beginning to curl and writhe.

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