

The Immortals' Sacrifice

By D. Davis

I continued to run, hugging the orb to my chest. I had to reach the others. I couldn't let them down.

The forest was thick and dense; every root seemed to be my enemy, tripping me. *Perks of being the fire goddess. The whole forest hates me*, I thought, fuming. If I didn't get my orb to the other immortals, the world would be destroyed. Suddenly, a vine wrapped around my ankle, and I crashed to the ground with a thud. A thorn grazed my cheek. I felt warm blood dripping down my face. *I need to reach out to Farrah. She's goddess of the Earth. She could command these vines to stop attacking me.*

As I'd done many times before, I focused on the mental link I shared with Farrah. Soon enough, I felt her presence.

In the depths of my mind, I heard her familiar voice. *Where are you, Aria?* Farrah's thoughts asked urgently. *We need the last orb! We're running out of time.*

I'm sorry! The forest is attacking me! It's slowing me down. I can't believe you're playing a trick on me now of all times!

Farrah's thoughts grew grave. *Aria, she thought, I'm not doing this. We're out of time. We need to transfer the last bit of power we have left. I'm sorry, but I can't help you.*

What about Royston and Gideon? Can't Royston fly me to the hollow?! I asked desperately.

I wish. Their magic isn't working either, Farrah replied. Through our connection I could feel her worry growing.

I picked myself up off the ground. Before cutting the telepathic connection, I thought, *I'll be there soon. Then we'll put the plan into action.*

Stay safe, Aria. Please... I don't know what I'd do without you, Farrah pleaded.

I will. See you soon.

I cut the connection. My eyes blinked back into focus, and I ran even faster. The situation with the forest didn't improve. Between Farrah's loss of control and the Earth's grudge against fire, traveling was nearly impossible.

I knew that if I didn't hurry, the Vicon would reach the others before me, and then all hope would be lost. Bruised and weary, I arrived at the hollow. I found Farrah, Royston, and Gideon waiting, each holding orbs of their own. They all looked exhausted. Farrah's blue eyes were dull, lacking the glimmer of hope they'd once held; her wavy blonde hair was tangled and matted. Farrah's twin, Gideon, wasn't any better. A long cut on his arm still dripped blood; ugly bruises covered his fair skin. Royston, usually confident and fearless, looked uneasy, his brown eyes full of apprehension.

"Aria! We've been so worried!" Farrah exclaimed. She ran to me and hugged me tightly.

"I'm okay," I reassured her.

She took a step back to examine me. "Well," she finally said, "you're no worse than the rest of us."

"Now, let's transfer the last of our power to the orbs, before the Vicon finds us," Gideon ordered, reminding us of the mission.

Royston muttered, "Can't believe we're going to become human. All our powers, our immortality, everything... gone."

"We don't have a choice," Farrah said, her voice shaky. "The Vicon's coming. The only way to stop it is to transfer our power. Far in the future, the heroes will do what we cannot: destroy it. We may not be the heroes, but we *can* prepare the way for them. Once we're human, we'll have done all we could."

Gideon nodded in agreement at his sister's words. Gideon held out his orb. It was dull and empty, but not for much longer. The orbs were irreplaceable; the only four in existence were all here. Transferring our magic was the only way to prevent the Vicon from getting it. Once we did this, it would find its way to the heroes.

We all held out the clear, round spheres that rested on our palms.

Suddenly, the ground began to quake beneath my feet.

"We're too late!" I cried out, knowing only one power could be responsible.

Royston opened his mouth to say something, but before he could utter a sound, the Vicon appeared.

I never would have thought it possible to feel so many emotions at once. Anger and rage, sorrow and regret, betrayal and horror. I'd thought I was emotionally prepared for facing it, but I couldn't have been more wrong.

The Vicon was a supernatural being, made completely of darkness, immortal, and nearly impossible to defeat. It had one weakness: it needed a

host. Without a its own body, it could do little. It was only able to cause small earthquakes. To convince someone to be its host, it would deceive them. By the time the host realized they'd been tricked, it was too late. The host must be very strong to retain its dark magic and power; most hosts in history burned up after only a few months. But this one was different. This host was my own brother, god of wildlife.

Grief gripped me. My brother was dead; his body may have been standing right in front of me, but my brother was gone, replaced with the Vicon's presence.

"Hello, Sister," it greeted, a cruel smile settling on the face of my brother.

"You're no brother of mine!" I snapped, seething with rage. "You aren't Malachi!"

I stared at it with hatred. I couldn't dwell on what had been lost. Malachi's spirit had been destroyed when he'd become its host.

Gideon stepped forward. He said bravely, "We'll *never* give you the orbs. You *will* be stopped!"

Malachi-- no, the Vicon-- laughed coldly. "I'm not here for the orbs."

"Then why are you here?" Royston asked icily. I remembered I wasn't the only one who had lost someone when Malachi succumbed to the Vicon. Royston had lost his best friend.

The Vicon made eye contact with each of us, one by one. It said slowly, "I am here because I am in need of... assistance. You all seem to misunderstand my plans for this world. Yes, I must cover it in darkness; yes, I must destroy it. But I am doing this to *purify* it. I will create a perfect world."

"What's your definition of a 'perfect' world?" Farrah demanded.

There was a strange glimmer in its eye. "A world where only the powerful survive. I will wipe the world of the weak creatures that plague it, such as humans."

"We can't let you do that!" Gideon objected.

The Vicon laughed bitterly. It sickened me to know the laugh had once been my brother's.

Its voice boomed, "You will either give me your power by will, or I'll take it by force."

"We'll never help you!" I spat.

Trying to manipulate my emotions, the Vicon said, "Unwilling to help your brother in his time of need. I thought you were better than this, Aria."

“Do not call yourself Aria’s brother. You may be using Malachi’s body, but you aren’t Malachi,” Royston hissed in fury.

Gideon held up his orb. “Once our powers are transferred into our orbs, they will find their way to the heroes. You need our power to put your plan in action. If we use the orbs, our powers will go to the heroes.”

The Vicon said slowly, “If you did this, you’d lose your immortality. You’d become humans. You’d lose all ability to use magic.”

“If that’s what it takes to protect the world from you, so be it,” Farrah declared, her voice steady.

Royston said quietly, clenching his fist, “Malachi was my best friend. He’s gone. I’ve accepted that now. I hate the thought of being a human and losing my power over the winds and storms, but sacrifices must be made.”

Before anyone could respond, Royston sacrificed his power for the greater good. His eyes shut tightly. I watched in shock as Royston, the one who’d been the most hesitant to agree to the plan, was the first to transfer his power. More and more of his power went into the strange orb. Strange ribbons of light flowed out of him and into the orb. Royston collapsed to the ground as he let go of the last of it; he’d done it; he’d given up his magic and become human. The orb he held was pulsing with a strange white light.

“Give me the orb!” the Vicon commanded.

Royston laughed. He forced himself to get off the ground. Panting, he said, “I don’t care if I’ve lost everything; you’ll never get this orb.”

He threw it against the ground. Sparks flew out of the shattered artifact. They all grouped together, as if commanded by an unseen force. They zoomed out of the hollow and disappeared.

“Where did you send your power?” the Vicon yelled.

Royston smiled grimly. “We’ve already told you. The orbs’ purpose is to give the power it’s holding to the heroes. I have no doubt it’s gone to the realm of stars to await the heroes’ birth.”

The Vicon raised its hand in fury. It lifted Royston off the ground, who was now powerless to resist.

“ROYSTON!!” I screamed in horror.

Gideon yelled, “HEY! LOOK OVER HERE!”

The Vicon spun to look at Gideon, but it was still using its magic to hold Royston in the air. I watched in awe as Gideon put his power in the orb. When he was done, the orb glowed with a dark blue light, representing his control over the great waters. With a look of rebellion, Gideon shattered it. Gideon’s

power zoomed out of the hollow. The Vicon dropped Royston in surprise; it clearly wasn't expecting us to follow through with the plan.

"Farrah," I said quietly, "you know what we have to do. For the heroes."

Farrah nodded. Without another word, she transferred her power. Her eyes clouded with pain, but she didn't stop. Soon her orb was glowing with an emerald green light.

Farrah shouted, "FOR THE HEROES!"

She threw the orb down with all her might. The Vicon groaned as he lost all hope of using yet another power. Farrah's power was gone.

I knew it was my turn. I visualized all my power -- my immortality, my magic, my control of fire -- going into the orb. All my molecules seemed to vibrate as I gave everything away. It was agonizingly painful, but I had to keep going. I had to give away all my power before the Vicon could take it from me.

I forced myself to stay standing as the last bit drained away. The Vicon ran towards me, reaching for the orb. I shattered it just before it had the chance. I stood there, glaring at it defiantly, now human and powerless.

"You fools!" the Vicon hissed.

"Now only the heroes can get it. Long after we've died, they'll rise up and stop you forever. You can't prevent prophecy," Gideon declared, proud of what we'd done.

"This is not the end," the Vicon snapped, seething fury.

"You're right," I said rebelliously. "Centuries from now, the heroes will stop you. We've done our part."

"I WILL DESTROY YOU ALL!" the Vicon screamed in rage.

"Then so be it. We've done what we came here to do," Farrah declared.

The Vicon growled in frustration. "Forget this nonsense. Killing you is useless. Just know, your precious heroes will never stop me."

Without another word, the Vicon teleported out of the hollow.

"We did it," Gideon whispered in wonder. "Now only the heroes will be able to use our power."

"But the Vicon's still out there," Royston murmured darkly.

"True. But for now, we should celebrate this victory," I said.

Yet despite winning this battle, I knew we hadn't won the war. Royston was right: our enemy was still out there. But we had done all we could to prepare. All that was left to do was wait, wait for the heroes to save everyone from the evil power known as the Vicon.