

Shadow

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Another side to the story before and during the events of Drawn to Life.

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1 - After Midnight

This isn't you. This breaks every law, every custom, of your family and your people. This isn't just a crime, it's treason and heresy. You'll be run into Shadow for this, you really will...

"Shut up!" He ran a hand through his untidy hair and looked around, nervously. The shadows cast by the dim glow of the lantern were long and wavering, flickering forms dancing eerily across the floor and walls. He laughed, a fast, nervous sound that hissed through his teeth, when he realized he was talking to himself. He must be going insane.

For the hundredth time, he checked the pen held in his hand. The ink wasn't leaking, the tip was in good condition, it wouldn't slip out of his fingers. Good. Then he shook his head, impatient. What could happen to a pen in ten minutes? What was *wrong* with him?

He pressed himself against the wall as he stepped along. This was *wrong*, said a part of his mind. He swallowed, trying to ignore the heavy, sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. There *were* laws. He couldn't just do whatever he wanted. Everyone was subject to the ancient customs.

He growled to himself. Hang the laws, and hang the customs! This wasn't the old time! The age of the Creator had passed many years ago, and the age of Creation had come. It was their turn now. And if he was the only innovator, the only one who could see another way, a *new* way of living, well. He had never been much for playing commander, but he would take the lead if he had to.

There it was. He licked his lips as he contemplated the heavy, leather-bound tome. He stretched out his free hand. His arm was trembling as he rested his fingers on the dusty cover. His breath came faster, and he had to smother a cough as the dusty air caught in his throat. It only made him more excited. Soon, this hall wouldn't be dusty. It would be filled with the new creations of the Rapos. If the traditionalists didn't want to make their own creations, no one was forcing them to. If only they realized the potential of the creative minds there *were!*

He set the lantern down and stood looking down at the ancient Book. Shaking with excitement, adrenaline coursing through his blood, he curled his fingers around the cover's edge. His other hand undid the clasp, and he opened the Book of Life that the other Rapos so *worshipped*.

The colors on the first parchment page were impossibly vibrant for being so old. He nodded slightly, impressed. Perhaps the Creator really did exist. If he—she?—did, he or she might have done something to show it. But that was just further proof—the Creator, if there was such an entity, had left their little world for other projects.

He flipped through the pages of the book, looking at the drawings. A brilliant mind had come up with these things, he knew that, even if that mind wasn't that of a creator. His was a brilliant mind, too, and he deserved his chance at this sort of glory.

He would open the gateway.

He turned to the empty pages in the Book. It had always seemed strange to him, the few times he'd seen them, that the Book should have blank pages at the end. Hadn't the Creator completed its world? Or had it just overestimated the space the world would need in the Book?

"Not anymore," he breathed, and pressed the pen to the page.

In the lamp's pale light, even the line of ink following the pen's track had a shadow. He outlined the image he held in his mind. The lines formed the shape of a person—not a Raposa, but something similarly designed.

When the border of his creation was finished, he set down the pen for a moment. His hand was tense, as were his shoulders; he was too nervous to relax, especially while he was committing the most terrible crime of "destroying" not only a work of the Creator's, but one that was worshipped as the thing holding the essence of Creation itself, a conduit for the Creator's power.

Something moved in the shadows.

His head snapped up. He turned, searching the darkness, backed against the pedestal on which the Book lay. Someone else was here, hiding among the shelves. "Who's there?" he demanded. His voice rasped with the coating of dust in his mouth, startling him.

A pair of white eyes blinked open and met his. He jumped, hit the pedestal, and fell. He scrambled to his feet at once, not taking his eyes off those of who- or whatever was standing five feet away from him. His hands searched for something to use as a weapon, and found only his pen and lantern.

His eyes adjusted again to the darkness and he could make out a vaguely Rapo-like shape in the darkness. The figure was still, and barely visible, but he could tell that it was no Rapo. It was the ears, of course. It had no ears. Strange.

"Well, aren't you lovely," he said softly. "Let's have a look at you. Come into the light."

The person he'd created stepped forwards.

He muffled a yelp with his hands. It didn't look much like the creature he'd drawn, more as if the outline had been used as a frame and covered in ink and shadows. Flecks of darkness flitted around it like insects, and its whole body was deformed and misshapen, from the top of its uneven head to the black claws of its feet. The sight was sickening.

"Now," he mused, "what could have happened to you?"

It stared blankly at him.

"Can you speak?"

It didn't answer.

“Take that as a no,” he said. His heart rate was settling back to normal and his breath was evening out.
“Follow me.”

He lifted the Book gently from its pedestal and closed it. Then he picked up his lantern and slipped outside. The monster-creation lurched along behind him. He held the heavy volume close to his chest with his free hand and sprinted across the grass to the modest house near the center of the village.

“Keep low and don't let anyone see you,” he ordered the hideous outline-thing.

Then he sat down at his desk, opened the book, and began working.

2 - Lia

Morning crept over the horizon, above the trees, and in through the east-facing windows of a small house in the village of Rapoville.

The sunlight illuminated the chaotic scene: three shadowy forms asleep around the room, papers all over the floor, many splashed with black ink from a leaky pen which was now dripping steadily onto the floor, held loosely in the limp fingers of a Raposa with silver hair asleep at the table in the middle of the room with his face in a leather-bound book.

He woke up and stretched. Some of last night's frustration lingering, mixed with his exhaustion. He got to his feet with the idea of going out to the fountain and sticking his head under the water. Then maybe he would stop at Cookie's for a banya muffin and some coffee.

He was at the door when he realized the shadow monsters had all woken when he had and were all watching him. Pathetic inky things, really. He shook his head, annoyed. Why wouldn't it *work*?

"You'll all stay *here*," he said. "Don't move and *don't* be seen!" For secrecy's sake, he closed the shutters and pulled the blinds down. Then he closed the door, locked it, and staggered off to the fountain.

Before it came into sight around the trees, he could hear someone singing. He raised his head slightly, and felt a slow smile cross his face. Once he was clear of the trees, he could see Lia sitting on the fountain's edge, twirling a flower between her fingers and looking off into space.

"Morning, Lia," he called, and winced, as much from the hoarse sound of his voice as from the pain of talking.

She met his eyes and smiled. "Good morning, Wilfre. Are you alright?"

He nodded and sat down beside her. "Just need a drink, 's all," he croaked, and scooped up water with his hands. He took a few sips and shivered. "That's better." It was.

She tilted her head, mischief in her eyes. "You've got something on your face."

"What?"

Lia touched her cheek. "Something on your face, I said."

"What could I have on--" he began, and reached up to feel his own cheek. His fingers came away black with ink. He cursed through his teeth.

"You should watch your language around a lady," she teased.

He bit his tongue to refrain from swearing again.

“Fall asleep at your desk last night?” she asked. He nodded. “You've got to give yourself a break. It *is* possible to work yourself to death, you know.”

He laughed. “Writing random notes that mean nothing? Sketching pointless drawings? Getting ink all over the floor because my pen leaks? I'm hardly doing much hard work, Lia!”

“Just remember even genius Raposa need to sleep *sometimes*,” she said, beaming at him.

He laughed and knelt on the ground to put his head under the fountain. Over its splashing he could hear Lia singing softly again. He emerged, dripping, and took a few steps back before shaking his head like a dog to get the water out of his hair.

“Not everyone likes to get wet just because you need to wake up, Wilfre,” said a voice from behind him. He turned to see a younger Rapo cleaning the water from his glasses.

“Not everyone likes it when the terrible Raponerd interrupts their conversations,” he retorted. “Get out, Isaac.”

“Wilfre!” said Lia. “That's mean!”

“He doesn't have the right to just butt into everyone else's conversations--”

“He wasn't butting in, he was just coming over here! Honestly, just because you're important, you think you control the world! Come on, Isaac, ignore him, he's just annoyed that there's someone in this village who doesn't hang on his every word and action.” He began walking away, but he heard her call, “Someone with some sense, unlike every other adoring, empty-headed Rapo here!”

“I don't think I control the world,” he said, frustrated. “Not yet. But I will!” He turned and shouted, “I *will*, you hear me?”

There was no reply, and he turned and stormed into Cookie's restaurant.

“Mornin', Wilfre!” called Farmer Brown as he stalked in the door.

“Spect it'll be the usual?” asked Cookie's assistant.

“Morning,” he said gloomily. “Yeah, thanks,” he added to the Rapogirl, who scurried to get his muffin and coffee.

“What's wrong?” asked Mayor Carmichael as he sat down. “Did you spend all night working on something or other again?”

“No, but only because I fell asleep on a book,” he sighed.

“I'll get it,” said the mayor's wife, Teri, and handed Cookie's assistant a few Rapotokens as the girl

delivered the order.

"Thanks, Teri," he mumbled. He had a sip of coffee and a bite of his muffin, then put his head on his arms and sighed dramatically.

"Come on," said Chief Cricket, taking a seat beside him. "What's wrong, Silver?"

"Only," he sighed, then drew a huge breath before finishing, even more dramatically, "*Lia*."

Everyone winced and flinched away from him. "Did she turn you down again, son?" Farmer Brown asked sympathetically.

"It's alright, I'm safe," he said. He understood why they'd drawn back—he'd been known to strike out at anything on previous similar occasions.

"So what happened?" asked the mayor. "Another rejection?"

"Not exactly," he sighed. "I didn't get the chance to reach that point. Guess who interrupted us? None other than...*Isaac*." He sighed. "It was going so well, too."

"Isaac?" The mayor frowned. "I know Isaac. He's a nice young man. A good Rapo. What did he do to annoy you so much?"

"We were just sitting by the fountain, having a nice little chat--*Lia* and I, I mean, of course. And then *he* came stalking over in a terrible temper."

"And?"

"I told him we were having a private conversation and could he wait, please, and of course, no, *Lia* invited him over, and—to add insult to injury—ridiculed me!"

"Oh, Silver," said Cricket, sympathetically. "Don't worry about her. She's stubborn, but she's no fool."

"She'll see sense someday soon," added the inventor, Jonah.

"At this rate, it'll be Isaac who gets her!" he moaned, getting to his feet. "She scorns me, as does he! I'm a disgrace! A failure!" He slumped against the table and hung his head.

The mayor put a hand on his shoulder. "Don't give up, Wilfre. I'm sure she'll fall for you in the end."

"Rapo, I hope so," he sighed.

Galileo turned and said, wisely, "Talk to her at night. It is the most romantic time, you know."

"You would say that," he laughed. Then he sighed again. "Anyways, I'm always busy at night!"

He then turned to his coffee and muffin and proceeded to ignore the rest of Cookie's customers until

he'd finished, then returned home to get back to work.

There was a knock on the door.

"Who's there?" he called, intent on his drawing.

"It's Carmichael. May I come in?"

"Oh—no, it's a mess—I'm so busy, I haven't had time to tidy up in here, you can hardly walk, please don't come in, Mayor--"

"Alright, alright, I won't," laughed the voice outside the door. "What are you working so hard on?"

"I can't say," he said. "It's a secret project."

"I see," said the mayor. "I imagine you'll reveal it when you think it's time--"

"Mayor! Mayor Carmichael! *Mayor!*"

"Cricket?"

"Get Silver! Get everyone! But first you have to come see, Mayor, hurry, you'll have to come quickly! It's a disaster! It's a tragedy!"

"What is it, Cricket? What's happened?"

He stiffened. His muscles tensed. He knew what was coming.

"The Book! The Book of Life! *It's gone missing!*"

3 - The Thief

He jumped to his feet and sprinted outside, slamming the door behind him and whirling to pin Cricket to the wall. “Missing?” he demanded. “You mean someone stole it?”

“How else would it have disappeared? It's been taken! It's *gone!*”

“We have to gather the villagers!” he said to the mayor. “Surely someone would have seen it!”

“I'll help!” Cricket said at once. “Mayor, why don't you get the ones who live on the west side, and I'll get those from the east!”

“Thank you, Cricket, that would be a tremendous help,” said Carmichael. Cricket dashed away. “Wilfre, could you help me?” implored the mayor. “You wouldn't mind gathering the villagers from the southwest, would you?”

“Of course not, Mayor,” he said, and ran to do as he was told.

“Who's there and what do you want?” shouted Isaac when he knocked on the door.

“It's Wilfre! Someone's stolen the Book of Life! We're gathering the villagers for a town meeting!”

The door flew open; he only just jumped back in time. “Stolen?” echoed Isaac, his eyes wide and incredulous—maybe even a little afraid—behind his glasses.

“Yes! Stolen! Or it's disappeared at any rate, and I can't see how else it would have vanished!”

Isaac narrowed his eyes. “This isn't a trick, is it?”

“Of *course* not!” he shouted, frustrated. “Isaac, this is an emergency! It's no time for mistrust and—and—personal bias!”

“Let it never be said that I was biased,” Isaac sighed, and hurried away to vanish behind the trees.

He ran from house to house, hammering on the doors and shouting. Finally, exhausted, he went to the town square on Lia's heels.

Mayor Carmichael had already gathered the villagers from the north, and was standing by the Eternal Flame, looking flustered. “Oh, Wilfre,” he said, relieved. “I have to thank you.”

“Oh, it was no problem,” he said, and stood by the Flame as well.

A moment later, Cricket came running. “I've gotten them all!” he hollered.

"Thank you, Cricket," the mayor called. "Villagers, if you'll gather around here, please..."

Everyone crowded in to hear the mayor's calm, quiet voice.

"Something terrible has happened," announced Mayor Carmichael. "Something that yesterday would have been unthinkable."

You should start thinking ahead more, Mayor, he thought, but he didn't dare voice the opinion aloud. He didn't *think* anyone would call him on it, but he couldn't risk the chance someone would.

"I would never have believed it was possible," Carmichael went on, "but the Book of Life—the very same ancient tome containing the drawings our Creator drew our world from—has been stolen."

"If anyone has seen anything regarding the disappearance of this sacred treasure," shouted Cricket as he pushed his way through the crowd, "*please* don't hesitate to report it to us!" He reached the center of the square and stood proudly next to the mayor.

"Yes, please, report any information you might have immediately, to aid us in the capture of this...*treasonous* criminal."

Everyone began murmuring, but no one seemed to have any solid information to present. They waited a few minutes, and no one spoke up.

"If no one has seen hide nor hair of the thief," mused Cricket, "Then I have a good idea who must have done it."

"Who's that?" he asked.

"Why, none other than the infamous master thief...*Zsasha!*"

"Master thief?" he echoed. "Oooh, that sounds bad. Won't he be hard to find?"

"Which is exactly why we need to get started right away," said Cricket. He raised his voice above the villagers. "People of Rapoville! We must begin an investigation at once! We'll have to search for the infamous Zsasha if we want to find the Book!"

"If you are willing to help in the investigation, see Cricket at the station," said Mayor Carmichael. "This meeting is over."

He slipped away with the rest of the Raposa before anyone could tell him to come back or try and enlist him in a futile hunt for a master thief.

By the time night fell, his little house was so full of shadow-things he had to rip out several pages and tear them up to get rid of some. He had a hundred pages more of notes and wasn't any closer whatsoever to finding an explanation for the way his creations had turned out.

He worked until his eyes were so tired from the lamp's dim glow that he could barely see, and then

decided he'd done enough for the night and, frustrated and unhappy, went to bed.

The next morning, he didn't bother to go down to the fountain or to Cookie's before getting straight to work. Before he could lead the way into the Age of Creation, he had to solve any problems, work out anything wrong with the idea of drawing in the Book of Life. He had to understand what made the drawings so dark and mutated when they came to life.

Time seemed to pass strangely, slowly. Pages turned and shadows grew from nothing. He filled his pen with different colors of ink and wrote with a feather and with three brushes, and nothing helped. His mind was vaguely aware that there was a sharp pain in his stomach—had he eaten since breakfast yesterday?—and that he ought to have been tired, but he'd worked himself into a fervor over the inky shadow drawings. There wasn't much but adrenaline and willpower keeping him going, but he could stay awake for days on adrenaline and willpower.

“What the Rapo is THIS?”

He jumped to his feet and whirled to face Mayor Carmichael, standing in the doorway, looking shocked and horrified. “What are you doing in my bloody house?” he demanded. “Get out!”

“Wilfre, what are these—things?”

“Nothing!”

“Nothing? These—nothing?”

“They're monsters, okay! From Shadow! I wanted to--study them!”

The mayor narrowed his eyes. “You're not meeting my gaze when you say that, Wilfre.”

“I swear! It's true! I swear to the Creator! I swear on the Book of Life!”

“I'm not sure I trust your oath when it's sworn upon the Book. You didn't seem to believe it was so sacred a few weeks ago.”

“I *do* believe the Book is sacred! I *believe* the Creator drew our world to life in its pages! I just don't believe it should be forbidden for the Raposa to draw in it as well! *We* have brilliant minds! *We* could create too!”

“I've heard this too many times, Wilfre,” the mayor sighed. “Get rid of these things at once.”

“I—I--” He was breathing hard and fast, and he couldn't seem to slow his heart rate down. He was getting too excited, too nervous, and when he was in an excited state already... “I can't!”

“Why not?”

“I have to study them!”

“Why?”

“I—can't tell you!” His head was spinning, his pulse thundering in his ears.

Mayor Carmichael glared. “I'm telling you now—*what are you hiding behind your back?*”

“Nothing!”

“Step aside, Wilfre.”

“I'm not hiding anything!”

“Please! I only want to see!”

“It's only notes--”

“Then why won't you let me see them?”

“I can explain, Mayor, I swear I can, I can explain--”

“I'm sure you can, Wilfre,” said the mayor curtly. “But I would like you to step aside. *Please.*”

“No! I—can't! Please, Mayor, let me explain, I can explain--”

The Mayor moved quickly for a Rapo of nearly forty years, and one with a limp at that. He was taken by surprise and even his normally quick, now heightened reflexes weren't fast enough.

“*You,*” whispered the mayor, and there was a terrible fury in his eyes. “I should have seen this coming. Even so, I must say I'm *very* disappointed.”

“I can explain,” he said for the fifth time, but he was no longer panicking; his voice was steady, calm, and even.

“I know you can; I've heard it,” said Carmichael shortly. “Enough times that I should have known this would happen. Even so, I expected better of you. I see now that I was wrong.”

“Carmichael, listen to me,” he said coldly.

“Don't bother. I already know what you'll say,” the mayor snapped. He turned and walked to the door. On the threshold, he turned. “We'll see about this, Wilfre.”

The door slammed behind the mayor as he stalked out.

4 - Confrontation

He knew he might not have much time.

He sat down grabbed his pen, filled once again with black ink, and began drawing.

As the pen flew across the pages, he sensed, rather than saw, the shadows growing around him. He knew, even if he were captured, his dark drawings would be safe. Mayor Carmichael would never commit the ultimate crime and reason of tearing a page from the Book, regardless of what was drawn on it, even if it *were* these monsters.

When the pages had been covered from corner to corner in creeping shadows, he slammed the book shut and found the empty bottle of ink on his desk. He glared at the creatures around the room, then closed his eyes and willed them to gather inside the bottle.

No sooner had he opened his eyes to find that the vast majority of them had been contained, leaving only three skulking around the room, than there was a knock on the door. He closed the lid on the shadows and set the bottle on the desk. Slowly, he laid his pen down, and only then did he raise his head.

“Wilfre?” That was the mayor. “Open the door, please.”

“And if I refuse?” he demanded.

“We break it down and march in anyways!” shouted Cricket. “This is an official investigation! Open the door!”

“Cricket, we won't be breaking down anything,” said Mayor Carmichael patiently.

He sighed. “Come in.”

They entered, the mayor in the lead, followed by Cricket on his right, and, on his left, Isaac.

“Traitor! Heretic! Thief!” hissed the younger Rapo. “I never trusted you!”

“Those are harsh names to be throwing around,” he replied coolly. “What would Lia say?”

“Don't you dare try and tell me what my Lia would say!”

He laughed. “*Your Lia?*”

“D'you honestly think she'll want *you*? After *this*? The word's already spreading like wildfire. It'll be *minutes* before everyone knows what you've done!”

“And how many of them will believe it if *you’ve* been spreading the word, Raponerd?”

“Wilfre...” warned the mayor.

“I’m sorry, Mayor,” he said loudly.

“He’s not--” began Isaac.

“His sarcasm is duly noted, Isaac!”

He glared, first at Carmichael, then at Isaac. “What makes you so sure she’ll choose *you*? There are other Raposa here, you know!”

“We’re two of the youngest Rapos in the village,” Isaac said. “We’re the closest to her age!”

“Why didn’t you ever just give *up*?” he taunted. “Why would she choose a Ra...” A glare from the mayor made him change threads. “A regular Raposa like you, over a smart, well-liked, important Rapo like myself?”

“She wouldn’t!” Isaac said, and laughed. “And for *that*, I have to thank you, Wilfre. If you hadn’t gone and done *this*—” He gestured around the room at the shadows and the Book. “—I would have never had a chance.” He set his mouth. “So I guess I really *ought* to say thanks—it’s due to *you* I’ll be marrying her this summer.”

That was the last straw. Wilfre lunged at Isaac, hands outstretched, teeth bared in a snarl. He didn’t have a plan for when he got his hands on the younger Rapo, but instinct drove him to cause Isaac as much pain as was possible, to cripple him, maim him, tear his eyes out, rip out his throat, slice his face open--

The next thing he knew, he was lying on the floor, sharp pain stabbing into his back and shoulders, staring at the ceiling and with Isaac’s foot on his chest.

“I’m stronger than I look, Rapobully,” spat Isaac, his eyes flashing dangerously behind his glasses. “That’ll teach you to attack me!”

“That’s enough, Isaac,” said the mayor. “Back down.”

“I hate you,” he hissed up at Isaac.

“The only thing we have in common,” Isaac growled.

“That will do,” Carmichael repeated. “You can let him up now.”

They glared at each other, he on the floor and Isaac towering above him. Both were breathing hard. Hatred was coursing through him like fire. He had never been so furious in his life as he was with Isaac right then.

“Isaac!” the mayor said, almost shouting. “Back down!”

For a moment longer, their eyes were locked, and then Isaac stepped back and stood behind the mayor again.

“Get up, *Silver*” said Cricket. The once-friendly nickname sounded like poison.

“And if I don't?”

“Would you rather be dragged to the station, or walk?”

He got slowly, laboriously to his feet, wincing.

“From now on,” Carmichael said furiously, “there will be *no* physical violence in this discussion.” He glared at them both. “*Do you hear me?*”

“Yes, Mayor,” said Isaac. His eyes were still fixed on Wilfre's.

“Good. Are you alright, Isaac?”

Isaac nodded curtly.

“Wilfre?”

He began to nod, then swayed on his feet dizzily. “Nnnhh, maybe not...” He raised a hand to the back of his head.

Cricket scowled at Isaac. “Do you need to rest before we continue?” Carmichael asked. He frowned. “Well, perhaps *begin* would be a more apt term.”

He nodded and stepped cautiously back to sit down.

“He's fine!”

Isaac's shout startled everyone. Even Cricket jumped.

“Even now, even after you've seen the *truth*, you're letting him draw you in!” the young Rapo shouted. “You think that's *him!*” He pointed to Wilfre. “You think that's him, but it's *not!*” He gestured around the room. “*This* is him! These *things*—that Book on the table—*that's* what he is!”

Mayor Carmichael looked about to speak, but he changed his mind.

“Look at him! You think that's who he is, you think that's *Wilfre*, but you're wrong! That's just charisma and charm! That's a mask and an act! You look at him and you see a Raposa, but he's only lies and deceit!” Isaac was furious now. “He's an enchanter, that's what he is, a magician, and he's captured everyone in his spell!”

“Those are harsh accusations,” said the mayor. “He may not agree with all the ideas we Raposa hold true, but what you're suggesting is more than that.”

“Cricket, you know he's smart,” Isaac said. “Rapo, *everyone* knows that! And he *is* smart. No, that's a lie, he isn't smart. He's *brilliant*. He's an absolute *genius*. He's the best tactician Rapoville has ever seen, he's *logical*, he *strategizes*, he thinks things *through*, and what's more, he does it quickly. He's clever, creative, innovative!”

Isaac looked defiantly around at the stunned gazes of all three Raposa listening to him. “Yes!” he shouted. “He *is* clever! He *is* an innovator! He's got a great mind—one that rivals even Galileo's, I have to admit!”

The young Rapo looked from the mayor to Cricket. “But a mind isn't enough,” he said vehemently. “What good is a mind, if you don't have a heart? He is *the* most intelligent Rapo who has *ever* lived! I don't hesitate to admit that. But all of it, all his ideas, all his brilliance—it's all worth *nothing!*”

He paused and pushed his glasses up his nose. Wilfre inched back and picked up the book. The bottle of shadows, he slipped into he pocket of his jacket. Perhaps while Isaac was distracting them with his tirade...

“But the point still stands—he *is* smart. He's brilliant. And he's using that amazing mind he has against you. Against *us*. And by that, I mean *all* of us.” Isaac's hands curled into fists. “All that skill at strategy—what good is it if *this* is what he puts his energy into? What is his brilliant mind worth if *this* is what he does with it? Nothing! Don't you get it? He isn't a good Rapo! He's no better than any common criminal! There's only one difference—charisma. That's all he has over anyone else. He's *very* charismatic, and he knows it! He has the charm to get respect and sympathy from everyone, and he has the wits to use it to his advantage! He's had us all blind—blind to his fault, blind to his trickery.”

Wilfre slid to the door a step at a time. He didn't care about Isaac's story—he was in trouble anyways. He could try, if given the chance, to defend whatever was left of his reputation, but the most important thing was that he *must* not be captured. He couldn't let the book be taken back. Not until he understood what was wrong with the process. Not until he could show the rest of the world what was possible.

“We should have seen this coming!” Isaac said. “We should have seen him for what he *was*—a traitor and a heretic, nothing but a disloyal liar! But we didn't. We were blind. And the thing is, we didn't see it because we didn't *want* to see it. We wanted to believe that he was a good person. We wanted to believe him. I was drawn to him, too, you know. There's something about his voice, something about his smile. Maybe it's in his eyes—his eyes sort of laugh when he talks. There's something in the way he speaks that makes you want to trust him.”

“*Wilfre, sit down at once, and for Rapo's sake, put that Book on the table!*”

He jumped; he hadn't expected the Mayor to shout at him. Too startled to think of anything else, he scrambled back to the table and dropped the Book on its spine so it fell open.

“What do you have to say to Isaac's accusations, Silver?” demanded Cricket, taking a few steps forward and standing menacingly over him.

“Cricket, settle down,” sighed Carmichael. “Wilfre, do you have anything to say in response?”

“I say he's being unjust,” he said calmly. “He dislikes me and always has. I fail to understand why he needs to hold onto this silly grudge any longer; he has, after all, won the battle that started it. He has his prize. He has Lia. I suppose he just wants to ruin what's left of me.”

Mayor Carmichael glanced at Cricket, and then nodded for Wilfre to continue.

“I am aware that we have long been rivals, Isaac and I,” he said. “But have I ever made accusations of this scale? I think not! I have worked hard and it has taken me *years* to win the trust most of the village has for me. Can one *trick* his way into getting respect? I suppose it's possible, but I would swear on the Book of Life that I had no intention of doing so. I believe I have *earned* the respect I have.”

He fixed his gaze on the mayor's. “What,” he asked softly, “has Isaac done to win that trust and respect?”

5 - To the Bridge

Mayor Carmichael hesitated and looked to Cricket. The watchman looked unsure. "Well..." the mayor said awkwardly.

"You see!" shouted Isaac. "He's doing it *again!* How can you stand here, in the middle of this mess, with these *things* slinking around you, and *listen* to him? The facts are here—do you need more proof that he isn't the immaculate Raposa he's played the part of?"

"It's true that you aren't above subjectivity," said Carmichael slowly.

"If you can't believe me, than think about Lia!" Isaac shouted. "You've said it yourself, Mayor, she's no fool. She's a smart girl. I've *heard* you say it! And you're right. You're so right. She's *not* a fool. And if Lia's so smart, if she's such a clever Rapo, think about the choice *she* made! If Lia's no fool, then which one of us do you think you can trust? Me? Or *him?*"

The mayor opened his mouth, then sighed and hung his head. "Thank you, Isaac, that will do." He raised his head. "Wilfre."

"I stand by everything I said earlier, Mayor Carmichael--"

"I am not asking for a defense," Carmichael interrupted. "I am asking you to listen to me."

Wilfre fell silent, but fury was boiling inside him. He put his hands behind him on the desk and, surreptitiously, picked up his pen.

"For a long time, Wilfre, you have wanted the rights to draw in the Book of Life. Furthermore, you have believed that these rights should belong to every Rapo. Is this correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"And do you stand by this belief?"

"Yes, sir, but I--"

"Yes' will do, thank you, Wilfre. You wanted to conduct research on this possibility, is that right?"

"Yes, sir."

"And so you snuck into Creation Hall at night and stole the Book."

He hung his head. "Yes, sir," he mumbled.

"You did not think to ask permission to conduct this experiment, rather than deceitfully take and hide the

Book?"

"No, sir."

"Why was this?"

"I—based on past experiences—from the information I already had—I suppose it was just an educated guess--"

"Answer the question!" snarled Cricket.

"Cricket," warned Carmichael.

"From my previous inquiries about the subject, I guessed—assumed--I would not be granted permission."

"So you took the Book home."

"Yes."

"You attempted to hide the fact that you had it in your possession."

"Is this a trial, sir?"

"No, this is a confirmation of charges. Please answer with *yes* or *no*."

"Yes, sir."

"When the Book's disappearance was discovered, you proceeded to deliberately--"

"Wilfre, does your pen leak?" interrupted Isaac.

"I don't think that has anything to do with this discussion," he snapped.

"Answer the question, Silver!" roared Cricket.

"Cricket, calm down, or I'll have to ask you to leave," said Carmichael severely. "Wilfre, please answer Isaac's question."

"Yes, it does. Why--"

"*Get him away from the Book!*" Isaac rushed forwards and sent Wilfre sprawling across the floor for the second time. The pen went skittering away.

Mayor Carmichael looked at the half-complete drawing on the Book's open page. "How did you...?"

"His pen wasn't dripping," Isaac panted. "His pen stopped dripping."

“You could...*hear* that his pen had stopped dripping?”

“Big ears,” Isaac explained, getting up and dusting himself off.

“Cricket, I think you should run to the station and get a pair of handcuffs,” said Carmichael. Cricket saluted and bounded away. “Wilfre,” Carmichael said, “get up.”

Wilfre got slowly to his feet. The mayor looked at him. “When the book’s disappearance was discovered,” he said, regaining his composure, “you deliberately misled Cricket and the rest of the villagers by allowing them to believe Zsasha had stolen the Book.”

“Yes, sir,” he said. He looked at Isaac, standing barely two feet away, still panting. His eyes darted to the book and back. Isaac was in the way, but if he was quick and took the younger Rapo by surprise...

Carmichael limped over to the window and leaned heavily on his cane. “I must say, Wilfre, I’m disappointed. Very disappointed indeed. I truly did believe you were a good Rapo, but I see I was mistaken.”

He moved.

“*Owww!* *Owowow!* Get back here, you filthy, *bloody--!*” Isaac shouted a few words even Wilfre hadn’t heard, but he had already grabbed the book and was out the door. Isaac’s shouting would get plenty of attention, but Mayor Carmichael was so slow with his limp that he wouldn’t have much trouble.

He ran to the bridge.

6 - Fight or Flight

The village was in an uproar, but no one was outside. He could see shapes inside houses, people looking out windows, frightened but curious. Shadows were slinking around every corner, all shapes and sizes of them. He didn't care about them; they didn't matter. Not now. Not anymore.

He ran beneath the village entrance and stood on the bridge, with nothing but a wooden railing and the stone beneath his feet separating him from the endless chasm below. Anger tore harshly, painfully from his throat, and hatred hammered in his ears, reverberating in his skull and blinding him.

"This is what I think of you, Creator!" he shouted to the wind. He opened the book, grabbed a few pages, and tore them out. They spiraled and drifted down into the darkness. He watched them fall until they vanished. Fury built up inside of his chest as they slipped away.

"This is what you are to me!" he yelled, tearing more pages free and throwing them into the sky. "You abandoned us!" The wind tore the papers from his hand and scattered them. "You abandoned *me!*" He couldn't hear anything but his voice and his heartbeat and the roaring of the wind. "You're nothing, Creator!" He was shaking with rage. "*Nothing!* Can you hear me? Are you listening? Are you laughing right now, Creator?"

Hands grabbed at his shoulders. He pulled free. "You can be their deity, but you're not mine! Do you hear me? You aren't mine! You're nothing to me! *Nothing!*"

"Stop him!"

"Get the Book!"

"Jonah, help!"

"We have to get him away from the edge!"

Hands grabbed his arms. He growled in the back of his throat, snarling at them. He lunged for the railing. If he couldn't have the Book, why should they? It wasn't fair, it wasn't fair to destroy the Book only to spite them, but he had to do one last thing to bring their legacy crashing down. *Then* they'd see. *Then* they'd be sorry.

He was forced backwards, onto the ground. Jonah loomed over him, his tawny hair pushed back by his goggles, his white jacket flapping in the breeze. "Wilfre, stop it!"

"Jonah," he panted. "Jonah, you're my friend, you've always been my friend. Can't you understand why I had to? Don't you see what I'm working towards? Have some sympathy for an old friend! Haven't you got a heart, Jonah?"

Jonah's face was cold and distant, almost unfamiliar. "Cricket, grab him!"

“Let him up, Jonah,” said Mayor Carmichael. “I’m willing to give him one more chance.”

Slowly, Jonah released him. He stood up cautiously. Cricket was blocking the bridge to the south, and Jonah stood at the north. The mayor closed his hands around the book. “Wilfre,” he said calmly, “You have one more chance. Give me the book, and I may be able to forgive you, eventually. Attempt to escape with it, and I’m afraid I can do no such thing. I will have no mercy on you. *Choose.*”

Their eyes met, and Wilfre considered his options. Fight or flight? That was the choice laid before him now: fight for the book, or escape without it.

The answer seemed completely clear. He focused, preparing himself for what he was about to do. He couldn’t keep doing this, he would kill himself.

Don’t get distracted! he reprimanded himself. *Focus!* Cricket was strong, not to mention prepared this time. This was going to be more difficult. Not to mention he hadn’t eaten for more than twenty-four hours. He was dangerously low on any kind of energy.

He held the mayor’s gaze for a moment, then lowered his gaze. “Fine,” he said softly. “Take your Book! Have your stupid Creator! From now on, I don’t need a Creator to believe in! I don’t need *anyone!*”

He let go, and the mayor took the Book’s remains. Behind him, Wilfre sensed Cricket step forwards.

He acted mostly by instinct; his brain was shutting down at that point, focused only on getting him from one place to the next as effortlessly as possible. As the cold weight of a pair of handcuffs was closing around his hands, he grabbed the bottle of shadow from his pocket and tightened his grip until the glass shattered under his fingers. It was like sticking his hand into a fire, and the explosion of pain revived him.

He took off as shadow rose up around the three Rapos trying to capture him. The book didn’t matter now, it was too late to get that. The most important thing now was to get away.

His feet hit the ground lightly, incredibly lightly for the force behind each step, but he was channeling all his energy into going forwards with as much speed as he could muster. His fingers wanted to curl into fists, but to move his right hand was to cause himself such intense pain he felt sick and saw black at the edges of his vision. His arm felt heavy, but he was caught in a rush of energy born of desperation and determination.

He slipped into semiconsciousness, barely aware of the cold or the pain, but he kept running. Step by step, as the world blurred and faded around him and he fell into what might have almost been a trance, he kept running.

7 - Frozen

He barely noticed it when he fell. He'd run too far and too hard and too long, and it was only natural that at some point even the hyper-rush he'd gotten himself stuck in wasn't going to be enough. It was a few minutes after he collapsed that he realized he'd reached that point.

It was the cold that brought him back. He struggled to push himself into a sitting position, with only one hand to use. It didn't help that his fingers were completely numb, and the rest was searing from the bitter wind.

That reminded him he had to look at the injured hand. It was surprisingly difficult to raise his arm to see it. As soon as he had seen he wished he hadn't. There were still shards of glass in his palm, and he expected there were slivers he would never be able to get out. The gashes were so deep he could see the tendons in his hand--two of them severed completely--and still bleeding, though he'd all but lost circulation in his other hand.

The worst part was the shadow. All along the edges of even the tiniest cuts was a lining of inky shadow. As if that wasn't bad enough, it was twisting and changing as it had when he'd drawn it, and he had the nasty feeling that it might be spreading.

For the first time that he could remember, he was scared.

He looked towards Rapoville. It was little more than a blur in the north. He could make out the roofs of houses, if he looked carefully. He'd come a long way. What time was it? He vaguely remembered the sun setting, but it looked too bright to be nighttime. Dawn must be coming.

"So," he muttered to himself. "What now?"

He wrapped his arms around himself, trying in vain to fend off the cold. He had to get out of the snow fields, fast. Over in the east, he could see the forest. If he could get there...

...before he froze to death, of course...

He had to hurry.

But he didn't have the energy, didn't have the strength. He could barely stay upright, let alone walk all the way to the forest.

He was falling...

Darkness.

A/N: Yeah, this is a reeeeeeally reeeeeeally short chapter. I should apologize—this is almost not even a real chapter. If anyone's reading this story, I'm sorry. xD

I wanted to say I won't be updating nearly so frequently anymore. I had the whole first part in my head already, but now the parts I already know are much fewer and much farther between. Basically, I have a few parts a couple years prior to the events of the game, one part at the beginning of the game itself, and the very end. xD Sooo...I'm in kinda bad shape as far as updating goes.

I'll do my best though. :3

~D(W)G~