

# To Forgive



*To forgive is to betray.*

Casar's father had taught her that. He had lived with a hate so bright it became his all, lifeblood to one wishing nothing but death.

*To forgive the living means to betray the dead, the memory of the dead.*

Casar's mother had died in a fire that left their house in ruins. Casar's father had run towards the front door, but was beaten back by the flames, face and limbs burnt and bloody. They could all see Casar's mother upstairs, yelling through the window, holding their newborn child. The crowd watched as the two went up in flames, and watched as the house collapsed.

The culprits were found. Cris and Lauri, two young boys from poorer families in the village. They had crept into the house, thinking it was empty. Casar's mother surprised them, and in fright, Cris had spun with his wooden sword, catching her across the forehead, knocking her down. They fled the house in horror, tripping over a lamp, which flooded the room with fire in minutes.

Something had snapped within Casar's father. His eyes deadened, and he did not rest until he found them. Before any around could stop him, Casar's father had torn out Lauri's throat. Cris bolted, running through the crowd,

never to be seen again in Lithan.

*To forgive is to betray.*

They had travelled many years, searching for Cris, for a sign that he was still alive. Caesar's father would not rest, so consuming was his hatred. Her father became a madman, beating her when she refused to listen to him, when she told him he was wrong.

'Forgive,' Caesar had told him. 'This is harder than not. Believe me, I have had to forgive you many years of wrong.'

He had turned then, looking deep into her eyes. Flickering faint, she thought that in their hardness a small fire could be seen. An ever-so tiny light, struggling in the darkness that pressed ever close. Without saying anything, Caesar's father had gone to his bedrolls, and lain down. Later, when the night had stilled, she could hear him weeping.

Cesar longed to go to him, but could not. Could not bear to see her father as he was. She too cried, softly, so that none but the stars heard. Cried for the dead that could not be laid to rest, for the living that could not be forgiven.

In the morning, Caesar's father was gone. She checked all around camp, stretching her search wider each circuit. On returning, voices were heard.

'He was drunk Matan, he was weaving around like a top.'

The other voice answered. 'No boy, not drunk, but bearing the weight of much wrong on his shoulders. This is Bradley Gerod, the Bradley Gerod. The Hater, the Hunter.'

The first said slowly, with great sorrow. 'I know.'

Cesar could not go near the wagon. She watched from the trees as the two soldiers took away her father's belongings, her belongings. She watched the two of them talk over her bedroll, the younger looking around, the older shaking his head, picking up the bedding, and walking back to their horses. She watched as they left. She followed them to the village. Watched as they came to the other side of town, where a small yard of graves was kept.

Tears rolled down her cheeks, as she watched the older soldier place her father's sword at his side, a crown of bay leaves on his head. A raven squawked as Casar watched the hole fill with dirt, stamped down so no predators could get at it. Watched the stones being placed across the top, marking the head stone with a red slash, for those dead by another's hand. Watched Maten, the older man, placing his hand on the other's shoulder. A younger man, he leant down and stuck a wooden sword in between the rocks on the grave.

*To forgive is to betray. Casar heard these words. Yet to hate is to die.*

*It is harder to forgive than to forget. To forgive is not to betray,*

*To forgive is to live.*

***To forgive is to love.***