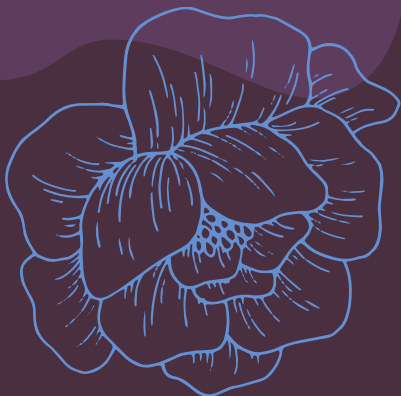




Kasharnta



A newsletter brought to you
by the Journalism club





Editor's note

Nonsense words have a special place in English literature. From Lewis Carroll's poem Jabberwocky to Dr Seuss's The Lorax, there are numerous examples of the creativity and freedom that language allows us, with just 26 letters of the alphabet.


There have also been attempts to use nonsense words as a tool for teaching young children phonics, although the effectiveness of this technique is debatable.

Back to its purposes in fiction, it is undeniably fascinating how humans are able to derive meaning from words which, by definition, have no meaning at all! If you were to read Jabberwocky, even if you were somewhat confused, you might find that your understanding of 'slithy' and 'uffish' is eerily similar to others' interpretations. It seems to point to the idea that our minds subconsciously associate meaning to certain sounds.

Most interestingly, some nonsense words actually make it into the dictionary! The word 'chortled', coined by Carroll in Jabberwocky, is now recognised as a legitimate word by well-known dictionaries such as Cambridge Dictionary or Merriam-Webster.

Nonsense words are usually used for comedic effect, but it does not have to be limited to that. In this newsletter, our writers have endeavoured to make their own meaning out of the nonsense word we coined, 'kasharnta'. As a result, the stories are widely varied, yet all preserve the central theme of trying to give meaning to 'kasharnta'.

We hope you will enjoy reading this newsletter and perhaps you will be inspired to define 'kasharnta' yourself.



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A Million Stars

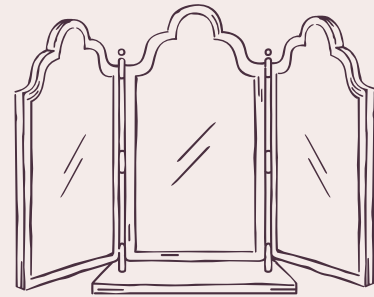
by Bindu

Kasharnta – a substance that circulates along with blood, to the very fingertips of the human being. It is a life source; it connects those who possess it and binds them together. It branches out from the soul, recognizing one's true inner strengths and feelings and releasing them in the form of supernatural powers. But only some develop their Kasharnta, and the day they do...

...is the day they turn thirteen.



Raven woke up earlier than usual. She trudged up to the mirror and rubbed her eyes, widening them as she looked in the mirror. Raven stared at her reflection, taking in the messy black hair and half-closed red eyes, which somehow still retained their piercing glare. A trail of saliva dripped out the edge of her mouth.



She turned thirteen today.

And yet... she didn't look different; she didn't *feel* different. She rubbed her eyes. Maybe the nervousness was just getting to her.

Her brother slammed the door open. Startled, Raven screamed and tumbled on the floor. Gin crossed the room in two long steps and grasped his sister's hands, those twinkling blue eyes boring into hers.

"Sister, today is the day. Remember the day we lay on the grass, gazing up into the stars? As they twinkled and shone, we promised to never let ourselves fade away! And that day we knew – we would shine as brightly as the stars. That...that even if we felt ourselves flickering, we promised to never let ourselves die out until a thousand years. We shared an oath, and as dawn rose, we walked together hand in hand beneath the orange sky. We never said it, but we both felt it tingling in our blood," Gin paused, biting his lip. "I promise, gift or no gift, we will always be siblings. For eternity and beyond, I will always, always be your big brother."

Raven was surprised to see so much emotion brimming in those blue eyes. It was rare for her to see her dramatic, ignorant and carefree brother act so seriously. Her annoyed frown softened.

"Sheesh, what's up with you?"



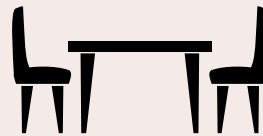
Raven stared at the ground. She knew. This was probably his way of telling her that everything was alright.

But she really really wanted to get a gift, to develop her Kasharnta. She didn't know what she would do if she didn't. Everyone in her family had already developed theirs. What if she never would? Would the rest of her family still accept her? They already treated her like an outsider; she didn't know how much worse it would be if she didn't. She was confused. She was scared. Her knees buckled.

She felt his hand on her head, ruffling her hair into even more of a mess.

"Oi! You're so annoying" she called out as her brother levitated himself away, his giggles filling the hallway, leaving Raven floating in the middle of her room.

But she felt better. Her brother had a way to make her feel better, like she was floating around in the sky. It was probably Gin's sixth sense that had told him that Raven was worried. She smiled, a bit of her worries slipping away as she tried to swim to the dining room, wrestling against the air.



As she twirled in the air and into the dining room, she was greeted by the familiar cold hard gaze of her mother while her father stared in the opposite direction, not bothering to look at her. Her brother gave her a slight smile. The room was dimly lit, a deafening silence resounding in the air.

"What an uneventful and miserable birthday party", Raven thought, chuckling darkly as she floated closer to the ground. Gin's spell was starting to wear off.

The room was barely furnished, with only a table, a few chairs and a single drawer. The only thing that stood out was a huge marble box on the table, colored gems adorning all four sides and with a light blue glow emanating from within it.

It was the box that would help her bring out her Kasharnta.

Raven's eyes widened, taken aback by the beauty of it. It had been passed down from generation to generation, granting her ancestors gifts suited to their strengths. Her mom, being a perceptive woman, was given the gift of telepathy; While her father, being good at faking his emotions, was a shape shifter. They were a pure-blood family, meaning there wasn't anyone in the family bloodline who hadn't developed their Kasharnta. Of course, not developing Kasharnta was normal in that day and age. However, for the pure-blooded main family, whom everyone respected, it would be an absolute sin not to develop a Kasharnta. If Raven failed...

Her father tapped the box impatiently, "Right. Let's get this done and over with."

Raven approached the box and hesitantly stuck her hand in. At once, she wrapped in a warm glow. Her heart beat furiously against her chest as her brown hair flapped around her. Her eyes burned. Her bones tingled. She gasped for breath, a myriad of colors flashing around her. It was happening. It was *happening*. It felt like eternity had passed when she finally opened her eyes.

"Mother, father I –"

Clang!

“–did it.”

Raven’s joyful grin disappeared as she caught sight of her mother’s expression of utter shock, Raven’s Kasharnta medallion had shattered near her feet. What was happening?

“You–” Her mother pointed a trembling finger at her, a disgusted look on her face. “I knew it. You *are* a witch.”

Deep fractures formed on the already cracked surface of Raven’s heart. *Why?*

Raven took a step toward her mother.

“Ma...”

Why? After everything I’ve done, after working so hard...

...Why am I still such a disappointment to you?

“Get. Out. Of. My. Sight!” her mom spat.

Raven’s heart shattered, she turned and ran. She felt something burning behind her, but she didn’t care. She just kept running, running into the woods, her surroundings becoming darker and darker. Uncomprehending, a word kept repeating in her head again and again.

Why?

“Ow! What did you do that for? Where did you even come from?”

Raven clutched her head, looking annoyedly at her brother sitting on the treetops. He had thrown a mango on her head, and Raven threw it back at him. He dodged it easily.

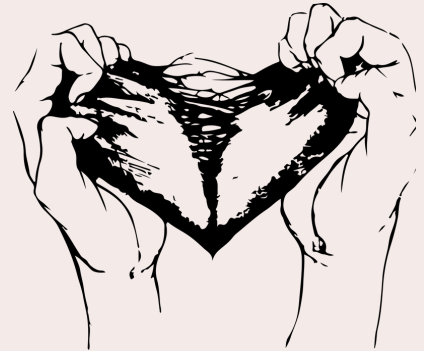
“Why, where did I come from? I came from an otherworldly planet called earth. You see, I am actually not a human; I have simply transformed to assess this planet, and when the day comes, I will take over this planet as well.” He paused, pointing to Raven and covering his mouth dramatically. “I have disclosed this highly confidential information to you. Now I must erase your memories!”

Gin landed on the floor with grace, pointing a stick at her.

“Can you go erase my memories somewhere else? This is annoying.”

“My services might be required fellow human. You are in need of the Cheering Up Alien!”

“What happened to taking over the world?”



“This is part of my top-secret operation,” he said, sitting on the grass beside her.

Raven shrugged, staring into the distance. “Whatever.”

They sat in silence for a long, long time. The sky began to darken, and soon, it was covered in a million stars, their lights not yet faded.

“Earth sounds like such a good planet,” Raven said suddenly, “No one has magic and without magic, people won’t be able to form their stupid hierarchies or rumours.”

“You never know though. You never know unless you go there, unless you walk, listen, see and taste the planet itself, you will never know what it is like. It is the same for a lot of things,” Gin said thoughtfully, lying on the grass and looking up into the stars. “I do know one thing though, we are all connected by the stars. We are even *made* of stardust. That’s a connection we all have to others, even strangers.”

“Do you want to tell me something?” Raven asked shrewdly, looking at her brother with a serious expression. Gin sighed.

“I do, but first...” He moved around and placed his hand in his pockets, producing a small object that glinted in the moonlight. He clipped it onto her hair.

“Happy birthday.”

A transparent diamond-like star adorned the end of the hairclip. It glimmered and shone, a magical aura surrounding it. It was as if a star had fallen from the sky and onto her Raven black hair; Like a lone star shining in the pitch-black night sky.

“It’s beautiful,” Raven whispered, touching the end of the hairclip.

“Did you make it?” She turned towards her brother, her eyes widening.

“No need to act so surprised, I *am* the best goldsmith in the entire land,” he scoffed, trying to sound annoyed. But he couldn’t help but let a smug grin slip through his lips. He observed his sister for a while, who took off the hairclip and placed it high up into the sky. It shone even brighter.

Raven giggled. When she turned toward him, her eyes were bright, and she smiled from the bottom of her heart.

“You’re acting like a little kid,” she teased.

Gin smirked, resting his chin on his hand. “Well, I guess I must tell you now. What you have is a ‘forbidden power’.”



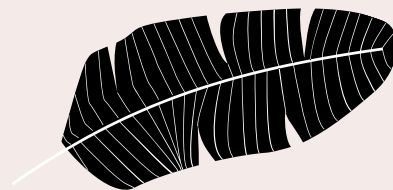
Raven stared at her brother incredulously.

Forbidden? I thought that the Kasharnta was supposed to bring out the true nature of your soul...?

"Kasharnta is a really mysterious phenomenon," Gin said, as if reading her mind. "Unfortunately, in certain rare cases, the Kasharnta gets very confused and doesn't have time to fully understand the true nature of one's soul. In that case, it simply replicates the powers of those physically nearest to it."

"So right now...I can levitate stuff?"

Raven looked at a fallen leaf on the grass and thought for it to levitate. True enough, it floated for a few seconds, before falling back to the ground. Raven tried to make Gin levitate, but she couldn't.



"Why can't I—"

"That's because the Kasharnta of the original owner would be stronger than your borrowed one. Though, you could still use the borrowed power on other people and objects."

"Man, this power sucks," Raven crossed her hands, annoyed. "This is no fun at all."

"However, considering that we don't always know the Kasharnta power of the one physically nearest to you, this power could still get really unpredictable and dangerous. For that reason, people fear this power, and shun and ostracise those who possess it."

Gin flopped back onto the grass, exhausted after the long explanation.

"...and for that reason, it is 'forbidden'."

Raven twirled the hairclip between her fingers, letting it all sink in. All her life, she had been trying to make her mother proud. Her parents had never really acknowledged it in the first place and now, she has made it worse, brought shame to the family name. Actually, she didn't care anymore.

"Oh god, this is all so stupid," she groaned. "Kasharnta is supposed to act as a binding force, not push people away."

"It is funny, they say our Kasharnta is what connects all of us, and I like to believe our bonds are what give us strength..." Gin grimaced, "Maybe that's why I like to believe in the stars."

"I want to go to earth..." Raven mumbled.

"Let's go now. I've found a way," Gin said quietly, turning away from her.

Raven rolled her eyes.

"You can't be ser—"

Just then the star at the end of the hair clip glowed red, and she felt the ground beneath her spinning fast. She gasped, feeling Gin beside her.

"Hey, wait a—"

She felt the world go black.

When she felt a pat on her shoulder and hesitantly opened her eyes, she gasped, standing there in awe as a light breeze blew across her hair. The sun shined brightly down on tall rectangular structures as huge colorful boxes with four wheels zoomed past. People scampered past her, talking in hushed tones. Raven's eyes widened.

"What?"



Gin grinned and grabbed her hand, leading her through the walkways of the foreign land.

Was this real?





Fire Of shanja



by Ariel

Flickering from below, flames speckled the forest floor, transforming the acres beneath into a second sky whose constellations marked out rolling streams and yearful dreams with brilliant gleams. It was a marvellous sight indeed – a considerable amount of time had elapsed before the figure behind the window pulled his gaze away and busied himself with writing once again. It had been no easy feat for him to have travelled there, and he was to make the most of it, he had told himself. But he allowed himself the satisfaction of the view for a few minutes longer.



“shanja–” Even the gentle voice seemed harsh in comparison to the serenity of the night scene. Mildly disgruntled, he turned, but brightened up almost immediately at the figure behind him. His saviour when he had been lost, she was now his mentor and guide. Not five days ago, he had dropped anchor upon this windswept island (though he now was without a vessel of any kind) and subsequently swept away by her into the nunnery atop the mountain. She had then disappeared into a chamber at the end of a hall, and her fervent, heart-wrenching speech even the traveller, uneducated in the language, could overall comprehend. Then it had been his turn to orate.

On the dais had been the Great Priestess, also called the Matriarch, or so he had been told; he wasted no time in making clear his intent – to barter the talent of language – albeit in unnatural articulation and distorted sentence structure that had been provided to him. She had nodded, never faltering, but in her furrowed brows and stilted tone he observed that she was not without qualms. It then seemed natural to him that his entry be denied – which premature civilisation would be willing to accept foreigners like his kind left and right, without dread of colonial rule?

The Matriarch had then taken to silent scrutiny, and that was when he had realised: His clothing and belongings had already revealed his status, and that he may as well have left that very instant. Preparing to draw the conversation to a swift cadence, he had glanced up then found her thoughtfully gazing back at him. Politely, he had stretched his smile a miniscule amount, and thereafter witnessed hers grow tenfold. Slowly, she had held out her hand, cheeks glowing with warm hospitality. The traveller had gladly accepted it.



“shanja, deaf as a log, dead as a rock. How sad,” interrupted the voice from behind him. A dense cloud of his own thoughts he had been lost in, the traveller realised with a start, and hastily he set down his pen and stood to face his hostess.

"*tashka*. What is needed of me?"

"Ah, *kara tantara*," she mused about his life returning and whatnot. Nodding towards the door, the girl continued, "*katarma sharnra'u*. Hurry."

"At this hour? This is no time for a meeting where I come from."

"Ah, but you forget, it is *katarma* you meet this time." It was a good enough argument, and *shanja* had no intent to debate in the first place; on the contrary, he had quite been looking forward to his second meeting with the enigmatic Matriarch and her esoteric ways. *tashka* turned and left, him following close behind her, fully engrossed in anticipation of what would be asked of him, and what he would have to say.

"*shanja*." The Matriarch looked up for only a second before returning to her crocheting, if it could even be called that – her bare hands were working at some sort of gold thread, thicker than wire but thinner than rope, twisting and tightening loops of string till all the gaps were filled.

With a polite greeting and a nod, he slipped into the other chair. This time, they were in no throne room: Fistfuls of coal littered the floor which had been chalked sooty black over the years, evidently to feed the beast – a fire crackling and roaring with energy at the other end of the room. The tropics were not the most suitable climate for a fireplace, but he basked in the radiance and smoky odour of it.

His eyes were drawn to the singular pedestal in the middle of the room, which seemed to bear... Nothing? It wasn't so out-of-the-ordinary, he told himself, for anything placed there would have been tarnished by ash and soot. The only thing bizarre was the plaque which adorned its midsection. *horaku gouda*, it read.



"Stone of Providence," piped up *tashka* (who had been at the doorway), as if she had read his mind. "Within lives the spirit of *ka'ava*. It is a fragment of the *rra'o* that shines down on us from above—"

"*kara vagadudanu*," interrupted the woman. Both turned to look at her.

"What?"

"Keep the flame alive." (To *shanja* she muttered, "Ah, my bad. *katarma* has always been sensitive about this.")

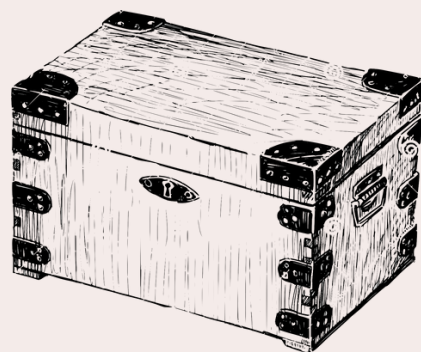
"*kasharñua, kasharnta, kasharnra'u*," the Lady explained (if that even helped could be debated, though *shanja* noted the brilliant display of tense) and launched into earnest speech at once: What good was being Great Priestess and Matriarch when she had failed those before her and those after? Why did she hold these titles at all? When the flame had gone out under her governing? She had failed her people, the sun, the moon, the seas; her extended tenure was now her terrible burden to carry. Her sacrifice was mere tuppence compared to that of her predecessors.

tashka helped to translate and the re-enactment of the great Lady's monologue was vividly animated on the girl's part, accompanied with wild gestures and flailing arms, but it was the loud, sniffling sobs that sent him over the edge. Doubled over from trying to stifle laughter, he could hold it no longer. Amidst his mirth, however, he caught sight of the High Priestess, who was by now subdued; it was the look on her face he could not put his finger on. One of reflection, absorption, but strangest of all: Relief? Then she met his eyes, and her expression morphed into one which was more motherly.

It was her pleasure to have induced such cheer, she reassured them, and children could not be blamed for their laughter; but surely children were not to be up at that hour, and that they be sent to bed at once. It was quite a novel feeling for *shanja* to be labelled a child again, but he had graciously forgiven the Lady on account of her general eccentricity, and then gladly retired to his room.

The next day was of much more significance – it was to be the start of holidays for where he had come from, and though his mentor had no inkling of it, she was to receive a gift. He expected none from the other however, as his own reward, he told himself, would be the knowledge which would accumulate through the months of his excursion. But what would be the appropriate souvenir? He had little to his name here, and what could he possibly construct in such miniscule a window of time?

As he slipped on his day-clothes, a sharp poke to his leg stupor. Frowning, he thrust his hand into his pocket and fished out a dull box long faded of detail. Instinctively, he searched for a convenient place to rid himself of the worthless item but found none. It was with a sigh that he had placed it on the furthest end of his desk – currently valuable real estate – but when he had looked back at it a second time it had been with gleaming eyes.



By the time the last shades of orange and pink in the sky had been displaced by dull azure, he had already been waiting at the door; gift, unwrapped, was in the hand behind his back. The faint noise of approach intensified at (oh!) such a slow pace that he could almost bear it no longer.

He slid the door open, and instead of wiry, spritely *tashka*, he was greeted by a surly, stone-faced woman holding up a tray of breakfast. She was stout, and had to jostle past him to reach the table which papers were strewn over with the odd rubber as a paperweight. In one deft swipe of her free arm, the desktop was clear once more, and she set down the laden tray with a huff. Rubbing his eyes in disbelief, *shanja* refused to believe the audacity of the woman before him, then remembered that he was not entitled to such service, and promptly shut up. However, he did have one more question to ask, on account of the box still clutched tightly in his now-clammy hands.

"*tashka*–"

"*kara vagañou*," she replied testily.

Patience running dry, he extended his numb arm to reveal the box. "*nomu kotu tantaro'a?*"

It was with an icy-cold glare that she growled, "*katarma kotu tantaratana.*"

"Thieves and burglars, I do not speak to."

There was not a hint of warmth in her tone, and *shanja* would have seen that her gaze was as such too, if not for the fact that it was fixated on the opposite wall. Flushing, he felt his cheeks grow hot.

"That woman was lying through her teeth," he responded icily, but immediately regretted it. Looking horrified, *tashka* spun round and retorted, "You are appalling, *shanja*. My own mother would never lie."

"Your mother?" Turning deathly grey, he tried feebly to justify himself. "But—"

By the time he had come to uttering his defence, she had already stormed out in a rage. Soaking in the momentary tranquillity of the atmosphere, his mind raced to the words that the woman had said. *katarma kotu*. What had the Matriarch to do with the box of matches?

Then it hit him. *kara vagadudanu*. *Keep the flame alive*. And all the time he had been thinking that it was a metaphor. But there was just one thing that didn't add up – what would the Stone of Provision be for?

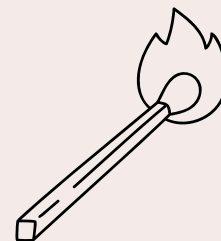
The stone that lay on the pedestal seemed oblivious to the scholar towering over it, but surely it had noticed as he raised it to his eye, for suddenly all he could see was blinding white.

"Is theft not enough for you, *shanja?*" In a rage, *tashka* flounced into the courtyard and up to the structure where nuns had been swarming around like bees to honey, surly woman following close behind. The duo paused when they caught sight of the glinting rock in his hand, and daughter whispered something to mother. A pang of guilt racked *shanja* at the view of the woman's horrified face, but he had to persist.

"*horaku gouda,*" he announced, raising the stone above his head, sending whispers rippling through the throng. Catching the sunlight immediately, the gem shone like an ember, casting all its rays towards the stack of firewood beneath it. With a mighty roar, flames manifested, ruthlessly tearing through the pile. Snatching a bucket from beside the well, *tashka* doused the blaze. "What can you do now, *shanja?*" she mocked, face contorted into a sneer.



It was more than he could ever want. Lobbing the glimmering rock at the crowd, *shanja* fished out the waterlogged box and held out the phosphorus-coated stick. A strike, a second, a third, and springing to life was a flame, prompting a collective gasp from across the crowd. This was not the end, however – it had merely begun.



A single flick sent it into the soggy tinder. It was initially slow, with wisps of pale smoke rising, but as the flame grew, the combustion accelerated, and not too long after it radiated with the intensity of the sun. The crowd recoiled in fear, but *shanja* maintained his gaze on the girl at the back, staring on at the inferno with equal parts of shock, horror, and sheepishness in her expression.

Noticing the success of his demonstration, her protégé smothered the flames and fled the scene, making sure to leave the door to his room open.

"I admit, *shanja*: It was my fault. I—" It was a dejected *tashka* that appeared at the doorway a few moments after, on the verge of wheezing after having caught up with him.

"Look here – I just need to know what your mother meant," *shanja* interrupted drily. Hard as it was to muster that sort of tone to her of all people, he had played the act quite well. "The Matriarch having a box? Why a box of those?"

"It *must* just be decoration," she responded, squirming. "She would never—"

"Not a soul can hear us here. Say all you want about *her*." He swiftly slid the door close and spun round to face her again. The girl glanced around, as if looking out for peeping eyes or listening ears in the walls. Upon ensuring their absence, her gaze settled on him once again and with a sombre gaze she continued:

"What we see may not be what *is*, *shanja*."

"*shanja sharñua ko u katarma tona u?*" the stout woman cried, breaking into a hoarse laugh.

"*mau vanu utonu,*" *shanja* gravely answered. There really was no other way to put it. Behind him was *tashka*, nodding in full earnest, tears glistening her eyes. He silently muttered a prayer of thanks for her acting skills.

"*tashka, tona utonu?*" In horror, she turned to *tashka* and queried. *tashka* made no response, but raised both hands to cover her face and made a sniffly noise of sorts. Only *shanja* saw she was trying to stifle a giggle, and shot her an angry look.

"*horaku gouda,*" he slowly said. "*dago karñua.*" The poor lady nodded in understanding.

"*katarma kotu,*" he continued, taking out the matchbox. "*okuku dago karñua.*"

Understanding dawned on mother's face as her daughter piped up, "*tarma, katarma kañua ko rra'o okukañua.*" Her inauguration had not been day to any mere rain, but to a full-on hurricane.

"*ka'ava goudana?*"

"*horaku goudu,*" *tashka* replied with a shake of head. *shanja* grinned. He had to strike when it was hot.

"*katarma vanu ko tarma-tarma onomura?*" he hinted nonchalantly. Dropping her sombre expression instantly, the stout woman's jaw fell in disbelief. Even *tashka's* eyes widened, and she peered out from behind her hands. "That was not part of our script!" she mouthed. He paid no heed, and continued:

"*ka'ava onomura?*" he pressed on, making reference not to the Matriarch, but to the one above her. Complexion turning pale, the mother finally responded with a flustered wave.

"Come, we are dismissed," called out *tashka*, whose tears were mysteriously quick to disappear. "That was her cue for us to come back tomorrow. Ah, I will pester her the whole night!"

He woke early the next day, for the chamber was still shrouded in darkness when he had slipped out from under the bedclothes. As usual, his day began with pen in hand and journal before him. The scholar only found out something was amiss when breakfast failed to arrive, and the inky darkness from outside refused to lift.

His first thought was if he had woken up too early, but he was too rested for that to have occurred. His second was to ask himself why there were moving pinpricks of light on the world below, and his third was that of great shock, as a great chasm of pure energy seemed to divide the sky in two. Recoiling from the window, it was grey, heavy clouds weighting the sky down that he first saw, then a brighter, circular patch in said clouds. It couldn't have been the moon, he told himself. New moon had been the day before.



Within seconds he found himself tearing down corridors and staircase, flailing his arms in an effort to get his cloak on. The empty halls steadily filled with people as he drew closer and closer to the core of the compound, until finally he rounded a corner, burst through a door, and found what seemed to be the entire population of the island, all of them staring at him.

It was a great hall of sorts that he had stumbled into. Where he had entered was raised above the rest of the auditorium in a stage of some kind, and a long corridor lined with candles ran through it.

On the left side were three seats, on the right were four, including one which more resembled like a throne than any chair. On it sat the Matriarch who appeared twice as large as she normally was, face hardened like stone, gaze burning with a sort of fury. Immediately *shanja* fell onto his knees, while audience watched on with bated breath. This was not the entrance that he had in mind.

"*sharnta katarma oñomuta.*" It was with a forced smile that she had pardoned him. If looks could kill, he would have died right there and then. The onlookers cheered, and he heard the unmistakable cry of "*shanja! Here!*"



"*tashka!*" He rushed to her, and she motioned to the seat beside her. "There you sit, *shanja.*"

"Here?" His eyes widened in understanding as he realised that he was not going to be among the audience. The girl nodded excitedly.

Now that all are here, let the trial begin, boomed a voice from above. A trial? What *tashka's* mother had lacked in attitude, she had certainly made up for in her decisiveness, *shanja* observed. The voice repeated itself again, and *tashka* glanced over with an anxious look, tracing a rectangle in the air. Now what in the world did she want from him?

The matchbox, he realised with a start, and fished around in his pockets trying to locate it. Meanwhile, the girl had produced the gleaming stone, and her mother an identical box.

Raising the items above their heads, the trio drew murmurs from the crowd. All three wore different expressions: *tashka* was grinning at the Matriarch in defiance, her mother maintained a stony look, and *shanja* lost in self-absorption.

"*katarma u,*" boomed the voice from above. If she had looked twice as large and menacing sitting down, the Matriarch was positively the embodiment of anger herself as she stood up. "*katarma kotu,*" she confirmed with the audience. "*toko, katarma kotuno tonā?*" The audience muttered in response, and a few shook their heads. Confident in her response, the Lady sat down once more.

"*kotuno tonatana,*" *shanja* spoke up. Possession had never been the crime. It all lay in its usage. Wet logs were brought in again, and demonstration carried out school-lab style. The only task left was convincing the masses. *shanja* noticed the twinkle in *tashka's* eyes.

"*ka'u!*" she began, stepping forward and flinging out her hands as if embracing the whole audience. "*katarma vanu? ka'ava tantara. katarma-*" here she gestured to the Lady and then to the stone "*-horaku kartana. ka'ava horaku,*" she added for good measure, then paused to observe the crowd's reaction. Their maintained silence was her cue to continue. "*katarma ka'ava onomurtana, ka'ava katarma onomura?*"

"*o-no-mur-ta-na!*" came chanting from downstage with a sly wink on her part. The party of six or seven schoolgirls – nuns – were armed with coconuts and eggs, and were ready to prove that they were not afraid to use them. *shanja* had to admit, it was pretty spectacular for a mere night's worth of planning. Chanting failed to catch on, but a few waves of whispering began to ripple through the crowd. He watched the spectacle unfold before him in equal parts terror and gleeful anticipation.

"*katarma karñua ko, ka'u oñomu karñud!*" *tashka's* mother finally yelled, and apparently it was the final straw.

"Silence!" snarled the seething Matriarch in perfect, unaccented English. "So, it has come to this point. If you intend to force me into a corner, I will have to warn you – do not find yourself taken aback when the consequences come back to bite you." Turning to the mob below (which at this point were debating among themselves what "sailors" meant), her speech was rapid and fervent. There was no better candidate than her, and in the face of the imminent monsoon, leadership was critical, and as such she had *stepped up* to fill in the gap. It was a blessing from *ka'ava* in its own way, she argued.

"She knows English?" *shanja* whispered incredulously.

"How else would I speak it?" the girl responded with a shrug.

As she tattered on, a strange feeling began to overtake him. It was one of uncanny *déjà vu*, and as he watched the spectacle unfold – the preaching Lady on the dais, her persuasive words diffusing into the crowd like a dose of poison gas – it all came back in an instant.

"Polaris! Maddie Polaris!" he gasped and reeled back.

"I see you know who I am now," the soi-disant Matriarch remarked, swivelling her gaze from the audience to fix them on him. "Saw me in the papers when you were little, hmm?"

It was too much for him to bear. Running forward to take centre stage, he shouted till his lungs could take it no more. "*katarma vanu tona. katarma-*" He did not know the word for "colonise", but "control" and "manipulate" he surely did.

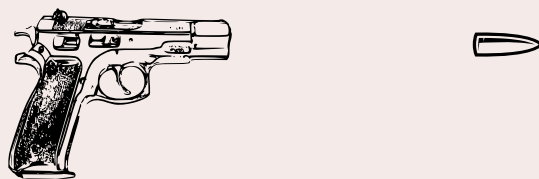


"*Tona'utonū?*" A woman shrieked. The mob went berserk, surging forward like a tidal wave, threatening to storm the stage. A few coconuts came sailing through the air towards the stage.

"It is time for me to introduce my friends," Maddie Polaris raised her voice over the chaos. Three men stepped out in unison from the three chairs behind hers, prompting a gasp from *tashka* and several loud exclamations from downstage. The girl's mother turned deathly pale.

"*tarmo!*" *tashka* cried, racing forward. "Father!"

Something isn't right here, *shanja* thought. None of the men moved an inch, and their arms stretched down to their belts, reaching for— Oh, no.



With two bangs that the scholar knew too well, the coconuts burst mid-flight into a shower of white flesh and salty water, and the hall was shrouded in a deathly silence. All eyes were on the man who held the smoking device. Oh, no.

"It'll be easier for you if you just follow me, *shanja*, or should I say, Hertz." Maddie smirked, and the three men shifted into clear viewing range. His heart sank as he realised all three had firearms. As she spun around to leave, they approached him ever so calmly.

"*kakara!* Stop!" Eyes widening in amazement, he watched as *tashka* positioned herself in between the assailants and him. "What are you going to do with *shanja*? What *have* you done to my father?" She looked as though she was about to burst out in tears.

"Since you are my niece, I will be more tolerant of you," Maddie started. "But regardless, my patience is not infinite. One more word and you will have to face the consequences.

Fury boiling over in his heart, *shanja* retorted, "What kind of person threatens a child? Her niece, no less! What happened to your conscience? What happened to *ka'u ko kasharnta*? What happened to *ka'ava*?" He had to stop himself from racing forward to give her a blow.

"Oh, I fear no man, and less so the animals of the sky," she responded, tossing her head in dismissal. "Though I must be rather indebted to *ka'ava*, on account of my so-long stay here. It is a *kasharnta* in itself to be governing this infernal place."

What she failed to notice was the small nod of the girl's head, and the hurried scrambling of the scholar's hand in his pocket.

As the men dropped their weapons to shield their eyes from the blinding light, three loud thuds were heard, and the men collapsed to the ground. A glinting yellow stone was in *tashka*'s hand, and in that of the boy had been a lit flare, burning brilliant white and sending sparks onto his arm.

"*vana!*" *tashka*'s mother cried, and the crowd surged forward with a battle cry of "*ka'ava ko!*" Within seconds, the men had been bundled off the stage and the Matriarch apprehended by her niece and the scholar. "This is for all you did to my family when my father was in power." Here, he forced her left hand behind her back, not cruelly, but not exactly gently too. "And this is for all you did to the people when your father was in power." Now it was her right arm.

“You owe me one more for what I was planning to do, Hertz,” Maddie snarled, grinning. “Wait till I bring my men to storm the capital once again. You think I only had three?”

That was when guards seemed to appear in every nook and cranny of the room. Below the arches, up in the rafters, streaming in from every door. His heart sank. There was not a way he could get past all of them. *tashka* was dazed, and her mother looked ready to sink to the floor. The men edged closer and closer to them, and with a final burst of energy, *shanja* motioned for the girl to distance herself.

“Why?” she mouthed.

“Take everyone with you,” was all he said in response. “They only want me.”

Mother and child leaped into the crowd as *shanja* led his own congregation further and further backstage. He calmed himself with the thought that it would be a *kasharnta* that he could finally call his own.

“Why don’t you show us what you’re hiding, boy?” taunted Maddie Polaris, gesturing to what looked to be an attempt to rip a hole in his pocket on *shanja*’s part. Feeling his nails almost tear from the exertion, he managed a smug “Why not?”

Within seconds, he had it all out, box, flares, powder and all, and in one swift swipe aimed into the air, a barrage of what appeared to be red snow came drifting down. Their eyes all widened in unison: His from glee, and the others from sudden realisation.

Only one flare was needed, before white was all they saw.



Complimentary Table for the Desperate

Please do try to read through the passage first and figure it out yourself.

Root	n/v/a	(past)	(future)	(negative)	Definition
sharn	sharnta [v]	sharñua	sharnra'u	sharntana	to meet, intersect
	kasharnta [n][v]	kasharñau	kasharnra'u		???
dago	dago [n]				wood, tree, timber
goud	gouda [n]			goudana	providence
hora	horaku [n]				stone, rock
ka	ka(tarma/ava/sharnta) [prefix]				to denote power, honour
	kana [v]	kañua			to enter power
kaka	kakara [v]				to stop
kara	kara [n]				flame, fire
					life, spirit
	karna [v]	karñua		kartana	to burn
ko	kotu [n]				object, possession
	kotuno [v]				to own, possess
	ko [particle]				X ko Y ≡ for X do Y
maun	mau [a]				two, a duality
nomu	onomura [v]			onomurtana	to like, love, enjoy, respect
	nomu [a]				liked, enjoyable, respectable
ñomu	oñomuta [a]				same, equal
okuku	okuku [a]				wet, watered
	okuka [v]	okukañua			to water, to rain, to wet
shan	shanja [n]				poet
tanta	tantara [v]			tantaratana	to return, retrieve
tar	tarma [n]				mother, parent, matriarch
	tarma-tarma [n]				ancestors
	tarmo [n]				father
tash	tash [n]				voice
tona	tona [a]				bad, evil, wrong
toko	toko [particle]				but
u	u [n][v]			utonu	talk, speak, speech
va	vana [v]				to come, arrive
	vanu [n]				way, path, method
vaga	vagadu [v]			vagadudanu	to weaken, falter



Preparing For Battle

by Penn Lun

The Kasharnta, an item of gargantuan power, able to produce disasters such as famines and earthquakes, to other more mystical occurrences, like giving one the powers of invincibility, levitation, or even mind control, all on the whim of the item's owner.

It was also permanently stained red with blood.



It would be an extremely powerful and useful artifact for anyone who owned it, if they managed to survive its might to see the results. Indeed, all those who have wielded it have perished a few years after having found it. The Kasharnta would then produce an extremely dangerous dungeon around itself, daring others to take on the challenge so it could find someone worthy enough to wield it. Still, many believed having it was of utmost importance, as it would greatly benefit themselves and their country, even if only for several years.

Or at least, that's what they said to me and my team. We were one of many teams that have gone to try and obtain the Kasharnta. It became ownerless just over 25 years ago and many teams before us had either died trying to get to it or escaped just before they did. There was not much information the survivors could stammer out, as if they had been traumatised by whatever had happened inside the dungeon. Thus, with such limited knowledge of the dangers that lay in wait, those that trained us mainly focused on the qualities of good teamwork, intelligence and physical prowess. All four of us knew each other from as early as our memory went. Every day, we had to undergo a training routine together to know each other better, maintain discipline, and to become fitter. We also learnt many other diverse things, ranging from ancient cultures to mathematics. Finally, at the end of the day, we had to go through a personal training to work on our part in the team.

"Greetings, Magnus. I see that you are thinking about something, as usual." Soren said. There were 4 people in our team. Soren was our leader and tactician who made decisions for the team, Ivor was the scout and scouted out dangers and traps, Gabriel was a warrior to fend off other people and creatures, and me, Magnus, a mage that was able to cast several spells. "Mind to share it with me?" He continued.

"Not at all! It was just that I heard rumours of... something."

"Well, what are those rumours?" He probed further.

"Rumours that several elite teams from a rival country, with few decades of training, are preparing to enter the dungeon." I replied.



Soren seemed confused for just a moment, but then immediately after looked as though he completely understood. "Ah. And you're worried we would have to go to the dungeon itself and take it before them."

"You're correct. I was thinking about the Kasharnta... and us. What if we're not good enough?"

"Whether it thinks we're worthy seems to be solely based on how well we can survive the dungeon. And if you ask me, the 4 of us make quite good of a team. The most important thing for us right now would be to prepare as much as we could right now, and when the time comes, we will be able to conquer the dungeon." I nodded in agreement.

Yet later that evening, the rumour became a fact. All the teams gathered at the middle of the village to listen to our village leader. "As many of you may have known by now, many teams from other countries, a few of which are their cream of the crop, have been discovered by our spies near the Kasharnta's dungeon, readying themselves to invade it. Losing such a large chance to claim the Kasharnta for ourselves is simply unacceptable, and so we have decided that many of our teams will try to secure it before they can. If you are one of these teams, I would advise you to prepare all the things that you need and have a good sleep for the day ahead. We'll be counting on you to get the Kasharnta." Before long, an assistant to the leader walked up to us and said, "Make us proud."

The four of us went to our dwelling. Soren promptly said, "It seems you were correct, Magnus. It won't be long before we'll have to leave soon. If there is anything you guys want to prepare or do before we rest, now would be a good time to do it."

Ivor responded, "There's not much to do before we head out. The logistics teams would provide us with the things we need in the dungeon. Although, a walk around the town would be nice." The rest of us all nodded in unison and we went out to the path.

While walking around, I observed the differences between our village and other typical ones. All around us were trees that shined with a multitude of neon colours, floating buildings and anti-gravity pads to access their entrances, and holograms and beacons to act as landmarks and convey information, all made possible with unused mana I and the other mages had. Although, with the deployment of many teams, many of these would likely decrease in scale. Of course, this all isn't to say that we mages were simply the most important. After all, these were just small conveniences and luxuries.

I persuaded myself to stop thinking about the surroundings and to simply just enjoy my last chance in a long time to see them. Soon, we made our way back to our dwelling and watched the sun as its final segments were cut off from our view by the rotation of the planet.



"Well lads, it's time to sleep, lest you don't get the Kasharnta or even die because you were knackered." Gabriel said. We all nodded in agreement and made our way to our beds.

"Hey Magnus, I see you're still awake." A voice which I recognized as belonging to Ivor's emanated from my left side.

"Well yeah, it's just been 10 minutes." I replied.

"Actually, it's already been 30 minutes." Ivor said.

"Oh. We won't get any rest like this, so if you're okay with it, I can cast a spell that makes us both fall asleep immediately." I replied.

"Sure." Ivor said. With that, I casted the spell.

When I opened my eyes again, Gabriel and Soren were already out of their beds, while Ivor had also just woken up. I sat up and looked outside the window. The moon was still bright in the dark sky and dew was fresh on the grass. It was the perfect time to head to a dungeon to acquire the strongest thing on this planet.

We made our way towards a dim yellow beacon to pick out our equipment from the armoury. As we were nearing it, two people who seemed to be stationed there shouted towards – no, shouted *at*–us.

"Finally! Another team after all this waiting!" The female towards our left shouted.

"Hey bloke, how many other teams already claimed their stuff?" Ivor yelled back.

The person on the right side motioned with his hands that there was only 1 group before us. I suspected either he was very well-mannered and did not want to scream while it was still night, he was very reserved, or he had a problem in his mouth or lungs, and apparently it was the former, as he immediately spoke up once he was near.

"Sirs, it seems you are rather early, and punctuality is one of many good traits a person able to acquire the Kasharnta should have. You may have the privilege of taking more than what has been assigned to you."



However, his companion just rolled her eyes and said, "Then why didn't you give the first people more as well?", to which he mumbled something about having to wake up very early because of them in response. Soon, a one-sided argument began between them. I quickly asked if it was okay for us to get our equipment in the meantime which they both accepted, before continuing their argument. Soon, we were making our way to the dungeon with body armour, a dagger, lockpicks, and large canteens of water. Gabriel had a halberd and a large bag to carry extra supplies, Ivor had a *Srcester* Army Knife and binoculars, Soren had a map he insisted on carrying as well as a first-aid kit, while I had a staff, an amulet to reduce mana usage and increase spell effectiveness, and several mana potions.

After many minutes of walking, we arrived outside the entrance of the dungeon. Many people were already here and fighting each other.

“Hey! How are some of the others from our village here already?” Soren cried out.

“They probably used all their energy running here only to be bloody useless, fighting some random people at the entrance.” Gabriel replied.

“Well, we definitely can’t just walk through that. I’m going to cast a spell to make us all completely transparent except to each other.” I said.

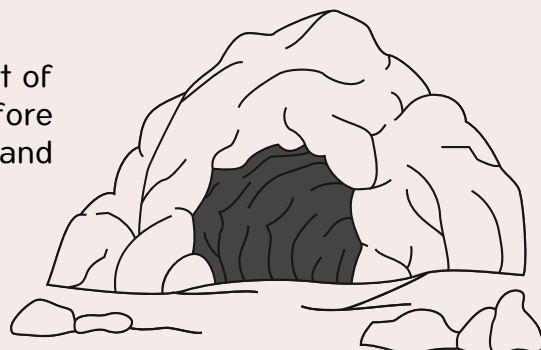
With that and some chanting, my staff glowed and in the place of my companions were white silhouettes. While we proceeded through the battlefield, Soren spoke up. “Our allies’ enemies all seem to be defending that one person over there,” he said while pointing to a person shouting orders.

“And you want one of us to go kill him? Sure, I can do so. I’ll be back in just a minute.” Ivor said.

Thus, we continued walking while spectating Ivor jog over to their general and swipe a dagger across his veins, not making any attempt to make him silenced. What followed were screams of shock from our enemy, but with the continuation of previous sounds, albeit with more slicing and less clashing of metal.

Ivor caught up to us as our invisibility wore off. He said, “Looks like that was a successful operation.”

We all grinned at each other. It was a moment of peace amidst the battle, a moment of calm before we turned to the gaping mouth of the cave and plunged ourselves in.





The Doppelganger

by Ri-Yen

Kasharnta. That was what I named her after seeing her in the hallway. I loved how that named sounded so much like an elegant and beautiful woman's name, yet it could be used equally fittingly as the name of a deadly weapon, one with a twist you would never see coming. If you wonder how I met her, it was on the most heart-wrenching day of my life.

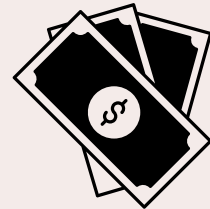
You see, that day was months ago. My sister and I had always been inseparable, and I had always seen her as my blood related sister. We had always got along, and even though she was adopted, I never really cared. Her blonde hair was just a few hues away from my dark brown hair. Her blue eyes matched up perfectly with my jet-black ones. So, we never let mere genetics get in between the love that we had for each other.

Yes, I knew that my parents only adopted Chloe because she looked different and unique. But I never hated her for that. In our house, she belonged, and I never let anyone bully her.

Life was amazing, till the day when our parents talked about their inheritance. We were 16 at that time. I was alright with splitting it with Chloe, after all she was family! But my parents insisted on the importance of blood relation. And that was when the quarrel began. The disbelief on Chloe's face soon changed into a cold malice.

"So, she's taking all the money, right?" Chloe asked scornfully.

After the guilty nod of my parents' heads, she turned her back on us, essentially ripping our relationship to shreds.



Later when I tried to speak to Chloe, she apologised. Wearing her mask of innocence, she told me that she loved me more than any amount of money. But something was not in place. She seemed to be... scheming.

Like underneath her bright and wide smile that I couldn't resist was some truth that would break me. Like how underneath her love for me was an abyss of hate, insecurity, and anger- not to mention hatred. But for whom? Her eyes showed a depth like no other, but why was there a tint of evil now? Her hands were so slender and beautiful, but why did it seem like they were holding on to a thread, a single thread that held her to her pretence?



It did not matter. Pushing those paranoid thoughts to the back of my mind, I embraced her. Engulfed in relief and happiness. I almost did not feel the slightest contraction of Chole's shoulder muscles. It was ever so slight, ever so innocent, but I knew what it was. A wince. Maybe I just hugged her too suddenly. Maybe.

After that, I didn't get to see Chloe in school.

The first time I met Kasharnta, she was standing in the hallway. Undisturbed by the storm of chattering around her, she just stood there, staring at me. Her hair was a hazel hue, and her eyes were a deep, luscious ebony. But her face... I could not make out. It just seemed so... unhuman. Yet based on those extremely blurred features, she looked almost exactly like me! What was happening? Who was this doppelganger?

Clouded with pure rage and blame, her eyes darted around, looking through me and finding out everything that could hurt me. The crimson rage in her eyes took on an even deeper shade. I watched as my doppelganger disappeared into the crowd, leaving the footprints of her pure malice and anger behind.



In a while, the hallway was clean.

The door of my locker slammed shut with a pitiful creak. I turned around, only to see Kasharnta again. This time she came closer, by just a few steps. And her face? It became clearer. Only now it was starting to look less like me and more like someone else I knew... But who?

I watched as her mouth curled into a tiny grin. Who was she? Why didn't anyone else notice her? Who was she? My mind was still lost in the depths of my questions when I tripped over a slippery patch of floor and fell, landing directly on my leg. Just like that, Kasharnta was gone. A clear slice of pain tore through my leg. Vision blurred, I tried to stand up, feeling my arm as I did. A haze of pain shrouded my vision as I picked myself up and checked for my injuries. No broken bone, but a severely bruised leg. Thank goodness... It didn't take long for this minor injury to slip my mind.

Day two. I was not clear why I was counting the days, but it just seemed... *right*. Like there was something life-altering and personality-changing about that day I quarrelled with Chloe. Where was she? I could never catch a moment with her anymore. Instead, I had this demonic presence of Kasharnta with me, ever watching and never yielding. The only time she went away was in my dreams. But still, *they* were plagued with images of Chloe, her angry and hurt expression as she stared at me in disbelief. How she realised that no matter what, the inheritance would not be lawfully passed down to her. How she-

I was still reeling in shock as I flew a few feet away from the students that elbowed their way past me. The nerve! Fighting the feelings of indignance that engulfed me, I stood up, only to see my arm dripping. A deep, rich shade of crimson ballooned out from my gash, spreading past the seams near my sleeves and dyeing everything blood-red. Numbled by the pain, I laughed. How did I not feel that! Where did that come from? What was that? Biting my lip, I glanced down, only to see a cream-coloured white exposed underneath the red and pink of my flesh. It had cut to the bone.



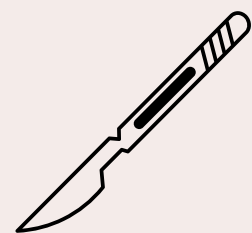
At this point, the glossy white floor of the school hallway was now stained a burgundy colour, while a thick pool of liquid gathered below my fingertips. Then my arm was on fire. No sooner had the pain come than I passed out.

Before my eyelashes interlocked and my eyelids closed, I saw Kashanta again. This time, I realised who she resembled – Chloe.

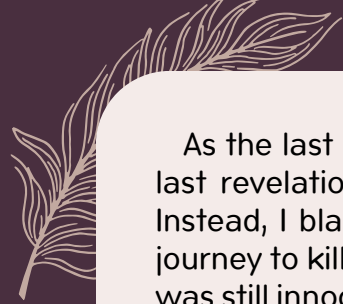
The next time I woke up, I was on a hospital bed, the bright and pristine surroundings hurting my eyes. I stared out of the window, watching the tiny lights of buildings flicker on and off. My arm throbbed with red-hot pain, while blood poured out if I exerted my arm muscles. Eager to go home and find the culprit, I forced myself out of the bed, my toes recoiling slightly as they came into contact with the marble floor. A sharp pain slashed its way through my arm, this time causing me to lose my balance and collapse on the ground. The amount of blood loss I had experienced made anger an impossible feeling for me now- it took up too much energy.

And then my Kasharnta came again. Instead of Chloe, she had to come. Her increasing likeness to my sister did not comfort me either. It was disturbing.

With her she brought a... pen? Smiling, she walked closer to me, crouching down and looking deep into my soul. I looked at her, my vision already blurred by the immense pain I was experiencing. Kasharnta looked beautiful- stunning even. But what was she? Maybe she was just a weird schoolmate of mine. Maybe she shared a class with me? But why at first did she look exactly like me? And then why did she start looking like Chloe? Through my blurred vision, I saw the reflection of light from the "pen", which I now saw was a paper-thin scalpel blade, come closer and closer.



A disembodied scream filled the rigid air of the hospital room. Who was that screaming? I watched as Kasharnta pushed the scalpel deeper onto the flesh in between my ribs. Blood... It trickled down slowly through the minuscule gap between the knife and my flesh. The air from my lungs hissed out of that hole, causing the thick red liquid to sputter and spray on Kasharnta's face. As she calmly wiped it off, I finally saw her. Chloe, my sister, sat there beside me, her expression full of malice and an unrecognisable evil. "It's my inheritance now. Thank you, Ashley." Those words were coated in such a sweet tone that I could not help but accept.



As the last breath of air forced its way out of the hole in my ribs, I experienced one last revelation- Kasharnta, Chloe, they were always one. I just could not accept it. Instead, I blamed myself! That was why I saw myself as Kasharnta, embarked on a journey to kill me. Instead of Chloe, for who she was. Because after all this time, Chloe was still innocent in my mind. It was my fault. Or that was what I used to think.

Red hot anger engulfed the last of my soul. Laughter echoed through my mind as I laughed, laughed at my utter idiocy and denial. Maybe at last, Chloe could break free and be the sweet sister I once knew again. After all this. I looked into Chloe's eyes once more. They now twinkled with happiness and accomplishment. After everything, they still sparkled.

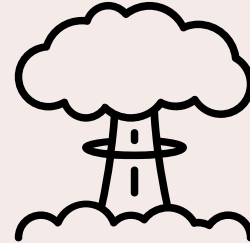


13th Of February

by Elgin

I remember when the sirens began blasting. A helicopter touched down on our front lawn, Dad on the pilot's seat. We had 3 minutes to pack essentials before takeoff.

The nuclear missile detonated as we reached 3,000 meters. Everything went white as if we were in heaven, then orange. Looking back at the city, I saw hell itself – a massive rapidly expanding mushroom cloud bursting in all shades of white, yellow, orange, red; devouring everything in sight.



When the shockwave hit, our helicopter lurched forward as it overcame our harnesses and threw us out of our seats. My head struck the control panel and blacked out.

I woke up in a snowy place and we disembarked. Aurorae put on a beautiful display, as my family and 711 others were led into the bunker. This was the last time in 16 years that I would see the outside world. I was only 8 years old.

Mike, a 69-year-old veteran, welcomed us with tea and introduced himself as leader of Humanity Hideout 6. He explained that a nuclear war had just taken place and earth was now uninhabitable. HH6 was one of twenty special bunker complexes built by the U.N, each able to sustain 1,000 people for 30 years. After gathering and briefing us, he gave each person a key to a room shared by 5 people. Mom, Dad, and I were assigned to room 89, with two siblings – Alexa, 18 and Arthur, 10. Their parents were dead.

Out of 9,187,069,420 humans, only 13,982 survived 13/02/2056; radiation poisoning, fighting and suicide left 10,475 alive by mid-2056. What caused this catastrophe? It began with an unexpected and revolutionary discovery, Kasharnta – a quantum radiation network flowing deep within earth's crust. Such was its significance that science itself had to be completely rewritten, and governments broke into chaos for its control.



The following audio recording was played to all surviving humans on 20 June 2056, uncovering the truth.

HUMANITY ARCHIVE SECTION J-89, FILE 334b

[CURRENTLY VIEWING SECOND SECTION OF SUBMISSION 334, SECTION J-89
---- FOR FIRST SECTION, SEE FILE 334a, SECTION J-89]

DESCRIPTION:

--- UNCORRUPTED AUDIO RECORDING OF 153rd NOBEL PRIZE (PHYSICS) CONFERENCE, 29 May 2054, OSLO (PART II) ---

LENGTH: 628.15

WARNING:

YOU MAY BE ACCESSING SENSITIVE, CONFIDENTIAL, CLASSIFIED OR REDACTED DATA. DO YOU WISH TO PROCEED?

153rd NOBEL PRIZE (PHYSICS), 29.05.2054

RECIPIENT(S): SOPHIE RICHARDS (15.05.2004-13.02.2056), DMITRY IVANOVICH ABURZOV (04.11.1992-06.02.2056), LIU SHIMIN (29.03.2001-15.01.2055) (ABSENT)

“FOR THE DISCOVERY OF THE KASHARNTA AND ITS IMMENSE POTENTIAL IN THE SCIENTIFIC FIELD”

AWARDED BY OLSEN GUSTAV (28.03.1983-13.02.2056)

FILE UPLOADED BY USER: jvigpars66 (31.05.2054 | 01:17:58 GMT)

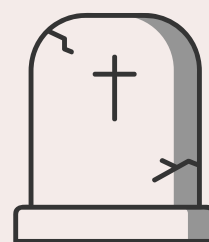
FILE RECOVERED BY: TC-07B HAZARD-PROOF ROBOT (13.06.2056 | 15:45:09 GMT)

Deep beneath the earth, in circumstances exceeding our 3-dimensional knowledge of reality, lies a network of higher-energy quantum flow channels that connect us to an infinite network of exotic alien worlds, the Kasharnta. This network lay undiscovered yet exerting a powerful influence on the primitive piece of rock we call earth now; we believe it allowed intelligent life-forms like us to evolve.

As humanity developed new technology and broadened its horizons, we were able to solve many of existence's previously unsolved problems, but many more remained. Is there alien life out there? Why does earth harbor intelligent life-forms? How do we explain the UFOs sighted by the pentagon in the 2000s or the hundreds of paranormal occurrences or mysterious disappearances that science just can't comprehend?

On November 15th, 2038, our team discovered the Kasharnta after months of grueling excavation and particle monitoring. 8 days later, Dr. Liu Shimin's team in China independently stumbled upon the same discovery.

It started with my ancestor, Paul Richards, an American soldier who disappeared on 17 August 1944 at Argentan, France. Comrades and locals searched the surrounding area in vain; when the war ended and allied prisoners were freed, he was still missing. The case was closed, and a funeral was held; no questions were asked until 2030, when I, fresh out of a Ph.D. in particle physics, found something amiss in his old case file at the family archive. I gathered a team and we journeyed to a field outside Argentan and detected a neutrino anomaly.



My team contacted research institutes globally for help and Arbuzov's team responded that they had found a similar phenomenon deep in the Siberian Forest. Multiple anomalies were uncovered globally - near Tamanrasset, Algeria; a point in the Pacific near Alaska and Canada; another point in the Pacific 100 kilometers northeast of New Zealand; deep beneath the Yellow River 27 kilometers west of Zhengzhou, China; a plot of land 20 kilometers south of Istanbul and somewhere in the Congo rainforest.

We drilled boreholes in two nearby locations at the Siberian hotspot, penetrating kilometers deep into Earth's crust, and lowered our most precise compact radiation detectors for every interacting particle. Data was then fed into a computer, which constructed a topographical radiation map of the crust in the area. Using the map, we saw a stream of radiation flowing through our crust. This was our first glimpse of Kasharnta. It comes from 2 words in the Balasi language - Kasmoh meaning energy and Aranta meaning stream.

Paul Richards didn't die. He was teleported to somewhere in the universe, perhaps an exotic alien planet.

When the Chinese team discovered the same channel 8 days later, we mapped out the full scope of the Kasharnta, which is what you are seeing on screen. Imagine the potential this discovery holds. All our knowledge, the books and theories, must be rewritten..... [ORIGINAL AUDIO LOST]

FILE CLOSED

This discovery was kept under tight secrecy due to the chaos it was predicted to cause - results had to be interpreted and compiled by the Nobel Prize committee under the noses of big corporations, but when hackers leaked data from Liu's lab in 2053, the secret was out. Everyone knew about the Kasharnta, and the Nobel Prize committee had to place it as the next year's physics prize.

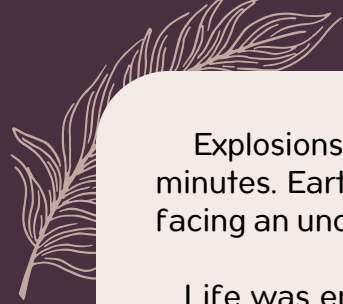


Soon, scientists discovered it provided a virtually infinite power source. Connect any power grid to the Kasharnta, and limitless energy flowed out. Kasharnta held greater secrets, like the key to teleportation, time travel and many other science fiction dreams, now tangible realities.

There was just one catch. Earth's climate crisis had destroyed international peace; in the eyes of world leaders, all that mattered was racing to harness the power of the Kasharnta. Battles and sabotages erupted as people blinded by power forgot how to cooperate and took drastic measures to eliminate competitors.

Law and order collapsed. On 15/01/2055, Liu was killed by Chinese authorities for advising them against war and capitalization on the discovery. Arbuzov died mysteriously on 6/02. Richards was kidnapped on 10/02 after extremists stormed her hideout.

Tensions between global powers were reaching extremes, and all it took was for a few people to flip the switch. At 20:14 GMT 13/02/2056, Russia fired 600 missiles, triggering a chain reaction which led to a global nuclear war.



Explosions blanketed earth and levelled its crust. 9 billion people, dead within 15 minutes. Earth, covered in fallout. Several thousand remaining humans underground, facing an uncertain and bleak future.

Life was empty after 13/02. Gone were the friends I had so much fun playing with, their laughter now a distant vision in this post-apocalyptic world. Lively cities reduced to piles of rubble covered in fallout. Earth's sights, sounds and smells, the calls of animals, the smiles of people. The deep alluring blue of our oceans, the fresh green of our lively forests, the vast beauty of our mountains and skies. Sunrises and sunsets, rainstorms and sunny days. All gone.

Lying awake during our first night, I thought of the world before. How many things had I taken for granted! I imagined the last moments of 9 billion people, rushing out of their homes at the nuclear siren's call. Spending their last moments enjoying the company of other people and nature, before the inevitable end. These thoughts accompanied me to slumber as I slept under a metal sky.

Thus began 16 years of underground bunker life.

We were given filling meals and fresh water decontaminated from the snow above. Air filters supplied us pristine air for ventilation. With 186 other children, I attended HH6's school, completing my education 8 years later.

VR stations provided an escape from the situation and allowed us to re-experience life before 13/02/2056. Once a month, the toughest men and robots would go outside in bulky radiation suits to conduct patrols and surveys. Through bunker life, I learnt to appreciate the small delights in life, the little things that keep us going.

I became close friends with Arthur as we bonded over video games and life's pleasures. Years later, we fell in love. On June 17, 2070, I brought our first daughter, Mabel, into life. Now a family unit, we relocated to room 183, and raised her in this small bunker world.



Such was the intensity of radiation that it took until 2072 to decay to a non-lethal level. By then, humanity's population had risen to 18,977 due to increasing births. When we first came outside exactly 16 years after the nuclear war and flew over earth in a helicopter, we saw nature had overrun our infrastructure – flora and fauna thrived on our abandoned streets and buildings, making a surreal post-apocalyptic landscape. I could not stop myself from smiling, because life proved it would always find a way.

The Kasharnta lies deep beneath the earth, giving us life. In our darkest times, it still flowed strong and steady, providing us with the hope and motivation to survive our worst catastrophe and rebuild a much better, modern society.





To Whom Will The Orchid Tell Her Heart's Resentment?



by Renee

All his life, Thomas Islay had looked ahead. He was born into poverty but relying on his ambition, grit and greed, he had managed to rise to infamy as the richest merchant in the whole of the money-worshipping archipelago in which he reigned. He often stood on the part of the deck nearest to the bow of his ware-laden ship, looking ahead at the vast sapphire ocean and dreaming of the gold and jewels that lay in wait for him at the next bustling port he was to conquer.

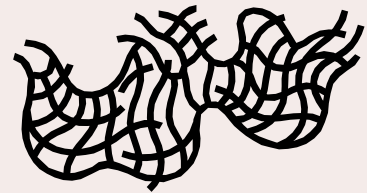
Most unluckily for Islay, on one of these familiar days, he found no deep blue waters ahead of him, but instead a most dull yet certainly unexpected shore, covered with sand that glistened merely of fool's gold.

Despite this setback, Islay, suddenly overcome by adventurous fancy, gallantly stepped off his vessel and onto the fine sand. Venturing deeper into the island along with some of his crewmen, he was convinced that he would somehow make a profit from this mishap.



Islay and his men wandered amidst the thick shrubbery and various exotic plants, stopping so often to examine all the rare herbs, flowers and fruits they found that the reddish gold hue of sunset was upon them before they had gone more than a couple of kilometres into the island.

Suddenly, (although afterwards, Islay said he had had a premonition of trouble,) they heard a faint rustling sound and a giant net, made of the thinnest rope Islay had ever seen, rose up around them like the monstrous tentacles of a gigantic octopus. When Islay caught his breath, he was looking down at the ground from 3 metres high, trapped together with his crewmen in the net so thin it looked like they were all floating midair.



"What fool has wandered into the Kasharnta net?" they heard a voice shout angrily.

In seconds, they were surrounded by a group of strange men, seemingly hunters by the bows and arrows they carried with them. The hunters wore large garments that draped over their figures like pillowcases and had rather ostentatious frills at their edges. Looking closer, Islay realised that aside from cloth, the clothing also appeared to consist of flowers and animal skins! Each garment was also dyed with an assortment of colours, such that each hunter looked more like a canvas of an unorthodox artist. However, the thing Islay found most curious was that they spoke English!



Islay and his men were taken by the hunters deep into the jungle as the sun set lower and lower until there was barely enough light for Islay to see the vague shadows of his companions.

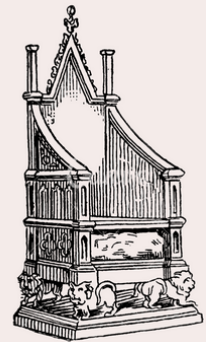
They finally stepped into a clearing and Islay, who had spent the past hour sympathising with the blind beggar he had often passed (and ignored) in his hometown, was now blinded again, this time by brilliant lights rather than the dark. He gawked in awe at the mountain of gold that lay in front of him, illuminated by the bright paper lanterns surrounding them.

The hunters pushed him rather roughly past the gold and they passed through a small village consisting of various wooden huts, which Islay barely noticed, his mind still enraptured by the memory of the shiny metal of his dreams. They brought him and his men to the largest hut and Islay was told that he alone would enter to see the Princess, who ruled the island due to the old King's poor health. Islay wondered that such a small civilisation had a monarch, but he supposed that even a small society needed some form of order, just like how he was the worthy ruler of his own thriving business empire.

"How should I address her?" he asked.

"No commoner may know her name. She is simply called 'Princess'," a hunter replied.

He met the Princess the moment he entered the 'palace', which was no bigger than his own house back on the archipelago. Although not breathtakingly beautiful, the Princess had a tranquil, graceful air and was very pleasant to look at, particularly her lovely blue eyes, the only ones of such a colour on the entire island. Yet, Islay, like a faithful husband, looked not at the Princess, but concentrated his utmost attention on the glittering gold throne she sat on. However, always the gentleman, he managed to tear his eyes away from the throne as the Princess spoke to him, her voice sounding full of money.



"You have wasted the Kasharnta trap, which took us many years to perfect and many precious resources to construct. It is the will of our people that you be punished. What do you have to say?"

Islay, well-prepared with his years of deceiving his fellow businessmen, replied, "I am Thomas Islay. I am most grievously distressed to have caused unintentional harm to your people. This Ka- Kasharnta... It is a beast, I gather? No worries, I shall capture it for you to make up for my carelessness."

Islay could have sworn that he saw a trace of amusement in the Princess's eyes, but she said most solemnly, "Alright, traveller, if you can capture the Kasharnta in a week, you shall be pardoned from your crime."

The Princess ordered that Islay's men were to be given a quaint, pretty hut to stay in and Islay himself had the honour of staying in a small room in the "palace". Islay was touched by this hospitality and the little island further rose in his esteem when he realised the decorative plates, candle holders, painting frames and many other ornaments in his room were all made of solid gold! Islay felt they looked very strange in such a village that in all other respects seemed so undeveloped and primitive. Nevertheless, he relished the opportunity to admire all the stunning gold objects.

Of course, Islay still had to worry about how to capture the beast as he had so confidently proclaimed. The morning after he had arrived on the island, he was pleasantly surprised that the Princess wanted to speak to him over a meal, for he desperately— although he tried not to show it— wanted to know more about the Kasharnta in order to devise a plan to ensnare it.

"What do you want to know?" the Princess asked him abruptly as he sat down to eat.

Islay, startled, paused in his admiration of the beautiful gold plates upon which his meal was served. "I hoped Your Highness could tell me how large the Kasharnta is? Or what its diet usually consists of?"

"Her diet', you mean." the Princess said smilingly. "The Kasharnta is a female beast that is said to roam our island. Unlike the regular animals you may be thinking of, the Kasharnta is the only one of her kind, there are no others."

"Then I suppose you wish to capture her as a status symbol?"

"The Kasharnta is said to bring fortune to those in her presence. Perhaps it has become evident to you, but our people greatly prize gold and other rarities." the Princess replied, still smiling, but Islay thought he saw a tinge of sadness in her smile.

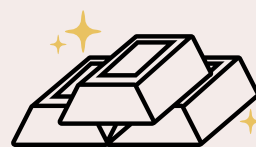
"It appears to me that your village is already extremely wealthy, especially for such a..." Islay caught himself before he could insult them.

"Perhaps you find our society primitive, but I assure you the people here all have their own talents. The men who brought you here are skilled craftsmen, who can weave from plant fibre the thinnest ropes that can hold a hundred men. Some in our village can turn rocks into liquid gold for our usage. There are—"

"Gold from rocks!" Islay exclaimed. "Why do you need a beast to bring you fortune when you have a limitless supply?"

"There are some people who can never have enough. You, of all people, will understand that." the Princess responded, smiling even more radiantly.

But Islay did not smile back.



On the third day on the island, the Princess brought Islay some scrolls with golden borders that were covered in writing. They contained all the legends recorded about the Kasharnta.

“It is curious that we speak the same language despite being separated by such a vast ocean,” Islay noted.

“Indeed, perhaps this is Fate...” the Princess said softly.

As Islay read through the legends, he admired the beautiful drawings of the Kasharnta depicted on the scrolls, growing increasingly eager to capture the beast to see her beauty for himself.

According to legend, the Kasharnta was two and a half metres in height and nearly 6 metres long including her long feather-covered tail. Despite the feathers poised on her tail and cascading down her legs, the rest of the body resembled a lion, with a beautiful mane and golden-yellow fur. The artist of the scroll had even glued small gemstones onto the paper where her eyes were, reflecting the deep blue colour of her eyes.



He was quite immersed in the legends until he came across a strange line: “*Although many believe she brings wealth, this is not the true power of the Kasharnta, whose secret lies in her name.*” Most infuriatingly, the scroll touched no more upon this topic and rather continued to describe the Kasharnta’s appearance in great detail.

“Anything wrong?” the Princess asked, making Islay jump, for he had forgotten she was still in his room.

Islay showed the Princess the scroll and to his surprise, the Princess looked most dejected. She sighed and fell silent. Islay, too awkward to comfort her, pretended to continue perusing the scrolls.

Eventually, the Princess spoke, “In the Old Language, ‘Kasharnta’ means ‘*the beauty of immaterial things*’.”

The next day, Islay bravely set out to try and prepare a trap for the Kasharnta. He spoke confidently to the “hunters”, who he now knew were skilled in creating traps, and discussed his ideas for capturing the creature. He posited that although their traps were superb, they lacked any bait for attracting the Kasharnta.

“We do not know what she eats nor do we know what she is drawn to. All the legends simply say she feeds on ‘the delights of life’, whatever that means...” one of the craftsmen grumbled, rather indignant at Islay’s haughty air.

“*The delights of life...*” Islay murmured as he strolled through the village, looking far off into the distance, letting all the bustling villagers and playing children slip past him in an amorphous blur of shadows.

He was so lost in his thoughts that, rather humiliatingly, he was once again startled by the Princess, who had managed to creep up to his side as silent and light-footed as a cat.

"Any trouble?" the Princess inquired cheerfully as they walked through the village market together.

"*'The delights of life'*...That is the secret to capturing the Kasharnta! What do you think it means?"

As he glanced at her, Islay saw the same dejected look she had the day before and he instantly regretted asking her. He was just about to stammer out an apology when the Princess suddenly stopped by a little stall on the side of the main road, which had a little makeshift roof to protect the owner from the burning sun. From the edge of the roof, facing the street, dangled over a hundred different types of feathers! All the feathers were exquisitely detailed and had myriads of colours, each feather unique from the others.

The stall did not sell feathers however, instead, it offered some pretty hair sticks, seemingly made of ivory, jade and other rare materials that Islay could not name. The Princess bent over the collection, laughing as she admired and praised them. At this moment, Islay felt the impulsive force that first brought him deep into the island take over him once again.

"Let me buy you one of them!" Islay said gallantly to the Princess, who smiled at his words. Thinking back on the moment, Islay felt rather shameful. As the Princess, she would surely be able to get any hair stick she wanted, probably even for free, but Logic seemed to have left Islay for the first time in his life.

Islay pointed to one of the prettiest hair sticks made of lavender jade, but the old shopkeeper smiled at him and shook her head. She explained that she would only give up such a rare hair stick if he gave her a sack of gold, to which Islay argued and bargained but eventually came out on the losing end.

Eventually, the old woman passed him a small wooden hair stick that, although smoothly carved, was extremely plain, especially compared to the others.

A smile dazzled in the Princess's blue eyes and she took the wooden hair stick from Islay, saying, "Thank you, I shall treasure it greatly."



It was the fifth day and Islay was in his room, pouring over all the scrolls he had previously read, hoping to find some information he must have missed about the Kasharnta.

His conversations with the Princess drifted into his mind. She had said that 'Kasharnta' meant '*the beauty of immaterial things*' and had also reacted strongly when he mentioned '*the delights of life*'. It was evident that these two ideas were closely linked, but what did they mean?

Islay thought of all the things he felt were beautiful and delighted him: gold, jewels, more ships to carry his wares...and...?

Two gemstones, blue enough to contain the ocean, floated into his mind and Islay hurriedly turned back to his scrolls.

On the sixth day, he had a meal with the Princess again.

"I am sorry I have not had much opportunity to speak with you, I've been most busy lately..." the Princess sighed.

"No worries! Er... May I ask what you have been busy with?" Islay asked, partly out of curiosity, mostly due to not knowing what to say. His glib tongue seemed to be failing him recently.

"Oh! People are always complaining about one thing or another. The other day, one of our herb gatherers accused another of selling his herbs at too low a price."

"How awful!" Islay cried, "It is always such people who bring down profit for everyone!"

The Princess stared at him and Islay resolved to never speak again.

The Princess kindly pretended that she did not hear what Islay had said and continued, "Then, of course, one of my advisors told me that I had to get more children trained to specialise in producing our gold as the piles we have are 'far too small'. I argued that the kids should be playing instead of looking for rocks, but when my father heard that he jumped out of his sickbed to scold me!"

Islay listened rather shamefully, thinking of all the gold he hoarded back on his ship.


"I'm so very tired of all of it... I wish the people would care less about their silly gold!" the Princess exclaimed, sudden tears streaking down from her eyes, making them appear even bluer.



Islay instinctively used his hand to wipe away the tears on her cheek before he quickly drew back and resolved never to move again.

His new vow in place, he decided he would break the former, and said, "Perhaps you could teach them to forget about gold? There are other great things in life, such as... er..."

His voice trailed off. Yet, as he looked at the Princess, time seemed to pause to take a breath. In that eternal second, he finally understood the meaning of *Kasharnta* and the single realisation pierced his entire soul.



That night, he sat on the edge of his bed and, finding the gold-filled room unbearable to look at, shifted his gaze to the stars outside through the window. He was at a loss as to what to do. He no longer wanted to capture the Kasharnta. Such a beautiful creature with such a name would not want to be locked up! But he feared that such a fate, if not for the Kasharnta, would be for himself. Perhaps he could just lure the Kasharnta nearer to the village? If she lived up to her name, maybe she would bring happiness to the villagers, make them forget their gold and be content with the beauty of the island and their love for each other? That would certainly make the Princess happy...

Islay fell asleep with a troubled heart.

It was the seventh day on the island and the end of Islay's deadline. When he woke up, he immediately asked one of the Princess's servants whether he could see her, for he wanted to discuss whether it would be possible to let the Kasharnta remain free.

However, the servant shook his head sadly and said, "There is no need. You may leave the island, we no longer care about the Kasharnta for now. The Princess is dead!"

And even the roots under the earth heard Islay's soul cry out in great agony.

Stumbling through the crowd that had gathered outside the "palace", Islay approached a delicate-looking tree that resembled a willow, leaves bowed in regret. Next to it was a little patch of dirt that had recently been disturbed. In front of the grave, there was a knee-high stone tablet covered with a white, flower-embroidered cloth.

The villagers tried to stop Islay, protesting that no one was allowed to go near the gravestones of the royal family, for their true names were written on them and that was forbidden knowledge. However, Islay pushed them aside.

He staggered forward and fell to his knees in front of the gravestone. There were flowers laid out in front of it, as well as a small narrow box that contained a single wooden hair stick. For a moment, he stared at the white veil that covered the roughly carved rock, before he lifted it off gently.

On the gravestone was an inscription:

*Here lies the Princess Kasharnta
Born in the 10th year of the reign of King Tasheque
Died in the 36th year of the reign of King Tasheque*

*The orchid emits a fragrance when no one is around to appreciate it,
To whom will the orchid tell her heart's resentment?*



Once upon a time, there were many Kasharntas that roamed the island. They brought peace and contentment to all the people who lived there and the creatures themselves lived off the love they felt from the people. Yet as time passed by, the humans grew resentful and yearned for gold and other riches, which the Kasharntas could not supply. The people did not have evil hearts, it was their dream that was foul. Eventually, the Kasharntas died one by one, no longer wanted by the people, until there was only one left.



The last Kasharnta was a young and innocent being and she often went near the village, hoping she could spread joy to the villagers. Every time she went, she saw the piles of gold in the village grow larger and larger and slowly she too wanted to have such beautiful belongings.

She abandoned her lion-like form and transformed into that of a young girl no more than seven years of age. She went up to the palace where the King lived and asked for a place to stay, saying she had no parents and no home to return to, which was not entirely untrue. Perhaps it was the magical aura of Kasharntas or maybe it was the remaining goodness left in the King's heart, but either way, the King was charmed by the sweet little girl and her blue eyes. "Poor little girl!" he said, "I'll take you in and from now on you shall be the Princess."

The King had no wife and no children of his own, so as he grew older and sicker, the Kasharnta, who had now grown into a beautiful lady, helped him to run the affairs of the small kingdom. The Kasharnta, who had enjoyed over a decade of dresses embroidered with gold thread and dazzling golden toys, now understood the price of all her riches. Every day, she would listen to her advisor and the villagers complain about the amount of gold they had and how others had cheated them of it. At first, she tried to peacefully resolve their conflicts, but eventually, she gave up and her heart felt empty and hollow.

One day, a stranger arrived on the island. Perhaps the wind who had forced his ship onto the island knew the Kasharnta's sorrow, or perhaps it was simply Fate. The Kasharnta and the stranger fell deeply in love and all the light that had left the Kasharnta's heart flooded back.

Despite wanting to stay with the stranger, the Kasharnta now knew she had to fulfil her true destiny and save the villagers from their greed. She tried to return to her original form, but unfortunately, many years of maintaining a human form had weakened her. The Kasharnta's spirit was torn from her human husk, leaving the people and the stranger to grieve over their Princess's body.

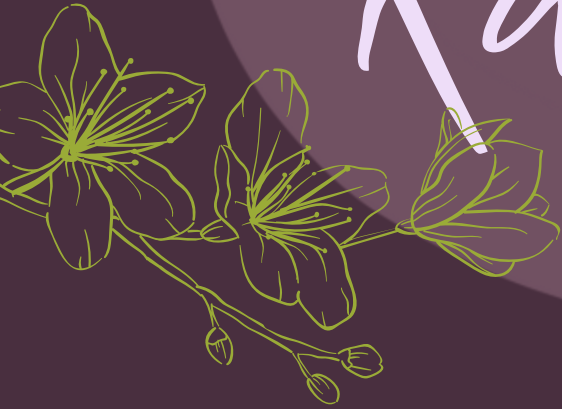
However, a Kasharnta's spirit is extremely powerful and it is said that after a hundred years of drifting together with the rushing rivers and the gentle breeze, the Kasharnta will be able to return to her original form and the people will once again understand *the beauty of immaterial things*.





We hope you enjoyed reading...

Kasharuta



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