

“Do you believe in fate?” Voe asked him, eyes round. Curious, like a bird.

“No.” Sig replied shortly.

“Why not?”

“Because it doesn’t exist. It’s not something that is real.”

“How do you know?”

“Freak my life, girl. Do you ever run out of questions?”

She shrugged happily, unconcerned. “Maybe one day. What do you believe in, if you don’t think fate is real?”

Not a terrible question. “Patterns,” he said after a moment of thought.

“Patterns and the similarities in them. In anything, really. Even humans.”

“Stinking, wretched humans?” Voe teased him good-naturedly. They were his words – thrown at her in rage the other day. He had meant to stab her with them; today, she used them to tickle and annoy him.

Damn her, she loved to tease. It seemed to be a compulsion of hers. Maybe she loved him. Maybe she loved herself. He wasn’t sure. “Stinking, wretched humans, yeah – especially when faced with something. Depends, though. There’s always going to be missing context in everything, everywhere – and people like to romanticize that instead of really search for it. Or figure it out.”

“It might be good not to, though. People understand things differently. Something might have a different meaning than what people think. And maybe some things aren’t meant to be explained.”

“Yeah, but then don’t say that shit is *fate*. Fate is predetermined, right? A series of set causes and set results that controls us. That doesn’t exist. Ever. What exists is predictability. It’s not gods. It’s not magic. Things happen. Patterns happen because similar people like similar things, think and say similar things, and do similar things. Patterns that repeat become predictable. Even when they appear to be different. There are always underlying connections.”

“So, fate is a bunch of patterns, then. Life is just...patterns.”

“Life is survival. People don’t like those who are too different from themselves. So, then those types of patterns become familiar and repeated with variation. And that sense of familiarity, combined with being in your own pattern – and accepting some situation as it happens, as you encounter it, whatever its result in whatever point in time – people call that fate, for their

own comfort. So they don't really have to question it, or work to change it. They say it's meant to be. It's *destined*." He turned his head and spat.

Voe eyed him sharply, but was quiet.

Their footsteps continued along the path. Gnarled fungal stalks the size of tree trunks stood like temple columns around them in vivid colors; it reminded Sig of those Slum artists who painted murals on shacks – their paint-palettes always caught his attention on his way off hunting. The fungal stalks before him belonged to Topcaps – gentle giants of fungi that took on countless forms, but mostly looked like the rarely-seen willow tree. Harmless puff-spores clouded the air from the ripe ones that were ready to breed. Sunlight filtered through the gaps between them and the interspersed trees, gentle and warm.

It was a beautiful day; the first they'd had in a long time since his and Voe's decision to travel together in the Wild.

Perhaps this wouldn't be so terrible after all.

"Would you say that we could be fated, Sig?" Voe smiled at him.

Sig knew she had listened, had heard him. So he went along with her silliness. He noticed that she tended to speak truth inside her stupid jokes. "If you don't equate it with magic or higher powers, then yes. I think so."

"You think all of these patterns happening in the world *aren't* higher powers?" A woman's smile on her, now. "Just because they can be explained doesn't make them any less magical. I'd say that makes it all even more magical – to live in a world you can love and understand."

He grunted against the growing warmth in his chest. "Just don't make shit up in it, then."

"Well, that helps too. At least to pass the time. That's a whole different set of patterns, isn't it?" she laughed.

"Got that right. One I'm not real interested in, though."

"Well, that's up to you, but I think you should be interested, Sig." Voe reached for his hand as she navigated a tangle of softer, rotting roots. He steadied her. "We can imagine *anything*, and make great things happen from those ideas. It's another kind of fate."