

She-Ra and the Princesses of Power Fanfiction

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Contents

Of Summer Rains And Songs Of Old 1

Heavy Is The Head 19

Stargazing 29

Of Summer Rains And Songs Of Old

On this calm and warm summer evening, big heavy raindrops danced joyfully from the skies, sparkling like little silvery fireworks as they dropped onto the grass, the pavement, the bushes, and the trees, while the cool breeze refreshed the air with scents of earth and rain. Finn and Catra were sitting on the front porch, watching the droplets mingle and play as they fell. It was a welcome cool after the hot summer sun they had enjoyed during the day.

Catra had been cleaning up after dinner when the rain started. The downpour came without hesitation, without a slow start that crescendoed into a heavy fall. It arrived as if determined to clear out the summer heat that very instant. After a brief look through the window once it had started, Catra had given it no further thought and continued with her work. With the leftovers packed up neatly and stashed away in the refrigerator, the washing up was due. Elbow-deep in the sink with both hands, Catra was just about halfway finished when she noticed a suspicious lack of noises her four-year-old should've been producing playing or just generally being a four-year-old. So she put down the sponge after she finished the plate she had been holding, dried her hands on the tea towel hanging by the oven handle, and went to the living room to check on Finn, whom she found gazing silently out of the window.

"Hey, honey, what are you looking at?" Catra carefully asked as she approached her toddler.

"The rain."

"The rain?" Having arrived behind Finn, Catra took a look through the window. There was, unsurprisingly, rain, and nothing remarkable or out of the ordinary to be seen.

“Yes, Mama, the rain. It’s raining.”

“It’s raining indeed, honey. Quite heavily.”

“Yes.”

They stood quietly by the window and looked at the rain. Some droplets stuck to the glass and slowly made their way downward, merging into bigger ones when they touched others and leaving behind a thin watery trail as they descended.

Catra had seen countless rains so far. There was nothing special or noteworthy about this particular downpour. And yet, something deep and urging told her unmistakably that the dishes in the kitchen sink could wait. After all, who knew how long the rain would keep up? Somehow, today’s rain felt a bit different nevertheless. As if it came with a sprinkle of nameless wonder and magic. There was certainly no sprinkle of nameless wonder and magic in doing the dishes. So they could wait.

“Honey, how about we go out the front door and watch the rain from the porch?”

Finn took a moment to think. “Yes.”

And so they found themselves sitting on the front porch, entranced by the mundane spectacle of a summer rain and the monotone choir of noise drizzling along with it. Every once in a while a cool breeze would caress their cheeks, dancing playfully along their skin, the blades of grass, and the leaves on the trees. Despite sitting under the roof, they could feel faint sprinkles of raindrops landing on their legs, arms, and faces, cooling and refreshing them. They watched the drops fall and glisten, they watched the clouds float by, they watched the trees and the grass bend in the breeze.

As it grew dark, the usual sunset’s fiery skies remained hidden behind the persisting heavy clouds. By now Finn had grown tired and had laid their head on Mama Catra’s lap, enjoying gentle caresses and scratches behind their ears. Their yawn betrayed what Mama Catra had suspected already.

"Honey, it's time for bed."

"But Mommy hasn't come home yet."

"She'll be back soon, love. Maybe even in time to kiss you good night."

"Can't I stay up a bit longer?"

"No, honey. You're nearly falling asleep already. It's time for bed. Now."

"Okay."

Finn didn't move.

"Now, honey. Off we go to brush your teeth." Catra lifted Finn's head gently.

"Okay."

Reluctantly, Finn got up and staggered towards the bathroom, and Catra followed.

Having just tucked Finn in, Catra was about to lean over to give them a kiss, when Finn asked, "Mama, can you sing me a lullaby?"

Catra gave it a quick thought.

"All right, fine. But you go straight to sleep afterwards. You promise?"

"Yes, I promise."

"Ok then. Let's see. Oh, I know. How about

Once upon a time, a Sapphire came to-

"No, Mama, not that one."

"Not that one?"

"No."

"Which one do you want, then?"

“Dunno. Some other one.”

“Then, how about

Let’s go in the garden, you’ll find some-

“No, Mama, not that one either. I know that one already.”

“Hm. Which one do you want me to sing then?”

“A new one.”

“A new one?”

“Yes, Mama. A new one.”

“Hm. I don’t know any new lullabies, honey.”

“Pleeeeeease?”

“I’m sorry, honey, but I don’t know any new ones. Why don’t you pick one I know?”

“But I’d like a new one. It doesn’t have to be a lullaby. Any song. Please, Mama.”

“But honey...”

“Pleeeeeeeeeeeeeeease!”

A gust of wind slammed some cheeky raindrops against the window glass. Which was lucky for Catra, giving her an idea.

“Okay. I just remembered an old song. But it’s not a lullaby.”

“That doesn’t matter, Mama. Please?”

“Fine. But remember you promised to go to sleep right afterwards, right?”

“Yes, Mama.”

So Catra cleared her throat and began.

The rain, the rain keeps falling dear

*The drops won't stop, the skies won't clear
The sun has not appeared in weeks
A cold wind blows, our old roof leaks
Yet there's no place I'd rather be
Than here, where you are close to me*

*I don't know what tomorrow brings
I only know that you're my light
That you're the wind beneath my wings
To you, my love, I give my hand
If you'll have me, as I here stand*

—

*The leaves have fallen from the trees
Few weeks remain until it's here
With ice and snow and chilling freeze
Yet I don't fear cold winter's bite
While we have us, we'll be alright*

*Whatever might tomorrow bring
Through summer, winter, fall, and spring
For all the time, come rain or shine,
You'll always have this heart of mine.
You ask, will I take you, my dear?
With you I'll spend all of my years!*

*My love, my love, I have to leave
The ship is setting sail this eve*

*The sea is calm, a good wind blows
Where to? Only the Captain knows
We sail away to distant shores
I might be gone some months or more*

*I don't know what lies past this night
I don't know what tomorrow brings
I only know that you're my light
That you're the wind beneath my wings
To you, my love, I give my hand
If you'll have me, as I here stand*

—

*I know, love, you set sail this night
While I need stay here on dry lands
Each day in sunset's crimson light
You'll find me on the beaches' sands
For those white sails I'll search the sea
Which carry back my love to me*

*Whatever might tomorrow bring
Through summer, winter, fall, and spring
For all the time, come rain or shine,
You'll always have this heart of mine.
You ask, will I take you, my dear?
With you I'll spend all of my years!*

They told me if I wanted gold

*I should come conquer kingdoms old
In war, they claimed, lies wealth and fame
I said "go back from whence you came"
The only thing that I'd fight for
Is to love you forevermore*

*I don't know what lies past this night
I don't know what tomorrow brings
I only know that you're my light
That you're the wind beneath my wings
To you, my love, I give my hand
If you'll have me, as I here stand*

—

*Let's hunt the beast, let's storm its cave
Come slay the dragon, take its loot
They said, in search for fools so brave
But all I gave them was the boot
The only quest I'd set out for
Is to love you forevermore*

*Whatever might tomorrow bring
Through summer, winter, fall, and spring
For all the time, come rain or shine,
You'll always have this heart of mine.
You ask, will I take you, my dear?
With you I'll spend all of my years!*

*The birds, they chirp, the sun shines bright
The bees, they buzz, no cloud in sight
Adventure calls, love, let us go
Tread paths unwalked, into unknowns
To forests deep and mountains tall
While you're with me, I'll brave it all*

*I don't know what lies past this night
I don't know what tomorrow brings
I only know that you're my light
That you're the wind beneath my wings
To you, my love, I give my hand
If you'll have me, as I here stand*

—

*I hear the call, love, take my hand
Let's go as far as we can walk
Adventure calls to distant lands
Past meadows green and hardened rock
There's nothing that will slow my stride
As long as you are by my side*

*Whatever might tomorrow bring
Through summer, winter, fall, and spring
For all the time, come rain or shine,
You'll always have this heart of mine.
You ask, will I take you, my dear?
With you I'll spend all of my years!*

“There you go. Now off to sleep,” Catra said as she tucked Finn back in and planted

a soft kiss on their forehead. But Finn had other plans.

"More, Mama, sing more!"

"That's a song I haven't heard in a while," a voice behind her said.

Catra's head spun around, towards Adora, who was leaning in the door frame.

"Mommy! You're back!" Finn squealed, untucking themselves in the process.

"I didn't hear you come in, love," Catra said, trying to regain some sort of composure for reasons she didn't really comprehend herself.

"I tried to be quiet. I thought you two might be in bed already," Adora said, joining Catra at Finn's bedside. She gave Catra a quick kiss on top of her head before taking a seat on the edge of the bed.

"Did you like the song, Finn?" Adora asked.

"Yes. It was nice. A little strange. I don't really understand it. But I liked it. I liked the sailing bit. Setting sail to sea. That sounds good. I like it when Mama sings."

"I like it too," Adora replied. "It's a very special song."

"How come, Mommy? Why is it special?"

"That's a story for some other time," Catra said "Tomorrow, maybe. Now it's time to go to sleep. That was the deal. You promised."

"But..."

"If you promised, you promised," Adora agreed. "We'll tell you all about it tomorrow, honey. But now it's time to say good night." She leaned over and gave Finn a kiss on the forehead. As Adora leaned back and stood up, Catra gave Finn another kiss as well and wished them a good night.

Catra closed the door to Finn's room upon exiting and checked both sides of the corridor for signs of Adora, who was nowhere to be seen. The sound of her footsteps and running water betrayed she had made it into the kitchen, where Catra was headed anyway. The dishes in the sink were still waiting for her. She found

Adora there, putting on the kettle.

“How was the meeting?” Catra inquired, leaning back on the counter.

“Not too bad. We didn’t get much done either, though. Everybody comes up with new urgent ideas and wishes all the time, and instead of getting some actual planning and organising done, they keep talking about what else would be nice and cool and spectacular and romantic and classy and... You know how they are when it comes to the Princess Ball,” she sighed.

“I can only imagine,” Catra smirked. “Are you hungry? There are some leftovers in the fridge.”

“No, thanks. Glimmer ordered takeout for everybody. Didn’t I tell you I’d have dinner with them?”

“You did. I was asking just in case.”

“Thanks, love. I was just gonna make myself a cup of tea. Would you like some too?”

“Perhaps later. I should get those dishes done now.” Catra went over to the sink and grabbed the sponge and a plate.

“Want some help with that?” Adora asked while pouring the boiled water into her mug.

“No, that’s fine. I’m nearly finished anyway,” Catra replied between putting away the cleaned plate in her hand on the dish rack and getting hold of the next one.

“Was Frosta there tonight? How is she doing?”

“Oh, she’s doing fine for herself. Keeps pestering us about making one ballroom a ‘metal chamber of eternal doom’ and letting her band put on a show.”

“Are you going to?”

“Maybe. I don’t know. Personally, I wouldn’t mind, but some other princesses feel that ‘brutal blackened grindcore with death metal influences’ is not the most danceable type of music while wearing dresses. And I think they might have a point

there.”

“Dresses aren’t great for mosh pits, that much’s true.”

“Yeah. We’ll see.”

“Heh. Death metal at the Princess Ball. That actually kinda sounds like fun,” Catra smiled. Adora did too and took a sip of her tea. She was leaning on the door frame again, lest she bumped into Catra cleaning up.

“Say, honey...” Adora began hesitantly.

“Hmm?”

“Just out of curiosity... Before, when you were singing *My Heart For Your Hand*, why did you leave out the last two verses?”

Catra stiffened her neck, trying not to look away from the final plate she currently held in her hands, but couldn’t suppress a smile forming across her lips. “Busted,” she thought. She was hoping Adora wouldn’t notice. Okay, maybe she was hoping a little Adora *would* notice. And then not bring it up. Okay, maybe bring it up, but not like this. She had hoped only a little. Barely even at all. You couldn’t even call it hoping, so little did she hope it would happen. Or Adora noticing.

“Hm. I dunno... Just because, I guess. No real reason.”

But Adora had noticed. Adora had noticed as clear as day. And a mischievous, merciless plan had begun to take form in her mind’s eye.

“Is that so? It couldn’t be... that you forgot how they went, could it?” Adora teased.

Catra looked at her, her pride clearly bruised. “Of course not. Don’t be ridiculous. I’d never forget our vows. You sang them to me hundreds of times. Just on our honeymoon alone. And I to you.”

“I did, I did... So... why’d you skip them?” Despite them being far from their teenage years, Adora still couldn’t resist poking and teasing Catra every now and then. Especially when the latter was being shy.

Catra sighed and thought of what to say. Adora, on the other hand, wasn't waiting for her response in the first place. In preparation for her fiendish, fiendish plan, she quickly leaned back through the door and glanced towards Finn's room, ensuring their door was indeed closed. Then she hastily, yet quietly, closed the kitchen door too, put her mug on the counter, and silently approached Catra on her tippy toes. Catra, who just put away the last clean plate and turned off the faucet, didn't notice what was going on and was surprised to feel Adora's arms around her waist. Adora approached into a close hug and put her cheek on Catra's.

"It seems to me you could use a reminder, love," Adora whispered softly into her ear. She could feel Catra's cheek extending into a grin as she put her arms on Adora's. And so, Adora began to sing ever so quietly.

*Oh what a day, can this be true?
I get to sing and dance with you!
I want the world to see and hear
How much you mean to me, my dear
It's more than ever I dreamed of
Today's our day of joy and love*

By the third line, Adora had begun to move her shoulders up and down, following the song's rhythm. After the fourth, her hips followed suit. Catra too had joined into the timid dance. Now Adora released her hold on her and gently pulled on her hips, inviting her to turn around, which she did, laying her arms on Adora's shoulders and locking her hands behind her head, her gaze fixed on Adora's sparkling eyes and goofy grin, which she caught widening as soon as she spotted it. Adora, freshly encouraged, continued her verse with an ever-so-faint blush gracing her cheeks.

*Each day with you is shining bright
Each day with you makes my heart sing
Each day with you, it feels so right
Each day with you is everything
Oh what a day, I'll burst with pride*

For on this day, I am your bride!

Adora gave Catra a playful, expecting look. But Catra did not skip a beat, and began her part:

*You dance and sing of love with me
I can't believe we've come so far
Was our fate written in the stars?
It's more than ever I dreamed of
Today's our day of joy and love!*

*Each day with you is shining bright
Each day with you makes my heart sing
Each day with you, it feels so right
Each day with you is everything
Oh what a day, oh what a life
From this day on, I'll be your wife!*

Warm memories of times long past flooded Adora. Memories of their wedding day, memories of their honeymoon, memories of blissful days, together alone with Catra. Memories of the fresh spring morning, where Catra had woken her up with gentle caresses while singing this song, with golden sunshine permeating through the curtains. Memories of the walk back home from Bow's birthday party, where Adora and Catra, slightly buzzed with Salinean wine, sang and danced to this song in the middle of the night on the streets of Brightmoon, giggling, kissing, getting yelled at by some lady about how late it was and why they were making such a ruckus at that hour. Memories of their hiking trip in the Kingdom of Snows, where they spent a night in the cabin in the mountains, snuggled up in several blankets when Catra suddenly leaned on her shoulder and began singing. Memories of her chest so full of love and bliss it felt like it was about to burst.

Alas, Adora wasn't given much time to reminisce. As Catra began her verse, she took a side step, guiding Adora into a slow rotation as they danced along to the

song that had marked the beginning of their marriage, the exchange of their vows of love and devotion in the presence of all people they held dear.

*When we were kids, back in the day
I'd sometimes fall and scratch my knee
You sweet girl kissed the pain away
And now it's clear as day to me
That I've loved you back then the same
Long 'fore I knew love had a name*

*With these words, love, a vow I make
You as my cherished wife to take
With you I'll sing and dance and live
With you I'll laugh and cry and grieve
Wherever leads our road ahead
Together on it we will tread*

Adora felt her pulse pumping through her ears, her cheeks burning. Catra hadn't broken eye contact the entire time, unyielding, unrelenting, determined. Her disarmingly gorgeous gaze was burning holes through Adora's very soul. Adora's blood was beginning to boil. She hadn't anticipated it to become so intense. Has it always been this intense? Maybe? She couldn't recall. She barely could form a coherent thought. Luckily, she didn't need to think right now. Adora's lines, which she had written herself, were ingrained into her heart. For all the time, through rain or shine, she'd never ever forget her rhymes. And so she replied in song, breathing heavily, aching from having to sing with a whispery voice, aching for the kitchen not permitting enough space for the dance which should've accompanied these vows.

*I travell'd this world wide and far
Through mountains, deserts, 'mong the stars
I found no sky to be so blue
As when I'm sharing it with you*

*Please don't ask for my heart today
I can't give what's yours anyway*

Catra pulled her arms in, cradling Adora's cheeks, and moved her head in closer. Eventually, their foreheads were leaning against each other. Adora felt Catra's hot short breath on her face. She felt it was nearly impossible to focus on her final few lines. Their dancing, as much as the kitchen and their wish to keep quiet as to not disturb Finn had permitted, slowly decayed into a standstill. Adora braved on.

*With these words, love, a vow I make
You as my cherished wife to take
With you I'll sing and dance and live
With you I'll laugh and cry and grieve
Wherever leads our road ahead
Together on it we will tread*

As soon as the final words departed from Adora's lips, Catra pulled in hastily for a long kiss. "Thank the stars," Adora thought, as she had barely managed to hold it together herself until the end of the song not to devour Catra on the spot. She pulled Catra into a tight embrace, still kissing, breathing heavily.

"See, I told you I didn't forget," Catra whispered after their lips departed and they slowly caught their breath.

"I know, love. I was just teasing you." They eagerly shared more and more kisses, until Catra pulled back, holding onto Adora's collar.

"It's just... The last two verses. They're ours. They're special. We wrote them. By ourselves. For each other. I don't want to sing them to anyone but you. Not even Finn. Does that make any sense?"

"It does, love."

"I know it's selfish but I just... can't. Won't."

“It’s not selfish at all, Catra. It’s perfectly okay. I’m sorry I teased you about it. I didn’t mean to make you feel bad about it.”

Catra replied with a kiss. As she laid her head on Adora’s shoulder, still in a tight embrace, Catra noted, “It’s been ages since we last sang to each other like this.”

“It has.”

“This was... intense.”

“I know, right?” Adora confirmed hastily. “I thought my heart was going to jump out of my chest. It’s still beating like crazy. I feel like a teenager again.”

“Glad to know I still have that effect on you.”

“You still have many effects on me, love.” Adora pulled back so she could see Catra’s face and caress her cheek. She wanted to tell Catra that she loved her, and to kiss her again, but the sight of Catra tightening her lips and trying without success to suppress laughter made her giggle as well instead.

“I can’t believe we’re giggling like teenagers again,” Catra said between chuckles. “I thought we’d have outgrown that by now.”

“I’m glad we didn’t. Even though we’re Mommy Adora and Mama Catra now. This is nice.”

“I feel like I’m a blushing bride in my twenties again.”

“I loved my blushing bride in her twenties. But I wouldn’t trade my blushing wife in our kitchen for anything.”

“You’re such a dork.”

“I’m your dork and you love it.”

“Yes, I love it. I love you.”

They kissed again.

“Shall we go to bed too?” Adora proposed.

“In a minute. Let’s just... stay like this for a bit, yeah? It feels really nice. And special, somehow.”

“Yeah, let’s.”

They maintained their close embrace wordlessly. Were they so entranced with each other they didn’t notice time passing, or did the steady sound of rain drown out the kitchen clock’s ticks? Neither of them could tell. Not that either of them cared to even think about letting this moment end. And so they remained, drawing deep breaths of carefree bliss, as the summer rain’s big raindrops kept tapping cheerfully on the kitchen windows through the night.

Heavy Is The Head

Glimmer locked the door behind her, sealing herself away for the night. Finally, she got a moment to herself. She dragged her feet over to the sink and brushed her teeth while inspecting the dark rings under her eyes. *It's not as bad as it looks. It's just the bad lighting here. You still look as lively and chipper as ever*, she comforted herself. She nearly believed it.

The duties of a queen were many. Doubly so in wartime. Glimmer had no idea how much shit her mom was dealing with every day without her knowing. Everybody wanted something. Everybody needed something. Fucking *everybody*. She had to sign off on strategies. On disaster relief. Rebuilding plans and budgets. Dealing with finances and the treasury. Architects had ideas. Villagers had needs. And ideas. And empty stomachs. And sick people. And wounded people. The soldiers needed medics too. And new armour. And new recruits. The cooks needed instructions. What to make for the diplomats' dinner. And what for the generals' meetings. And what for lunch with the agriculture representatives meeting. And what for brunch with the Princess Alliance. Same with the decorators. All the choices had different meanings behind them, as was tradition. A queen can't afford to insult someone by serving the wrong dish.

Heh. Fuck tradition, Glimmer thought, while spitting out toothpaste. She wished the dignitaries would also want to fuck tradition. But they seemed adamant in upholding it. They weren't fond of the notion of someone changing the rules of the game they were playing. Besides, upholding order, tradition, and appearances kept the citizens of Brighthmoon at ease too. Even Glimmer saw the use in that. She rinsed off her face and finally teleported herself into her bed, which was hung from the ceiling.

Going out on missions with Bow and Adora had been easier. Make a plan, rush in, watch the plan go to shit, improvise, kick some ass, get out, celebrate or rant, depending on how it ended up going. Rinse and repeat. This was different. Even when alone in her room she couldn't find a restful thought. Instead, only items on her to-do list kept popping up and away, occupying every inch of headspace they could find.

She had tried techniques to get all that under control. She was never any good at meditation. Glimmer was probably doing it wrong anyway, she understood that much, and be that as it may, it didn't help. Writing down everything she had on her mind and working the list item by item helped a little since she could comfort herself into not feeling guilty for not thinking about some of it for a bit. But it didn't do much for the few minutes of downtime she could afford before sleep.

She tried working out a schedule in her mind, a schedule of the next day, week, month, in an attempt to sort out everything she had on her mind. It made her feel better, it made her feel as if she had things under control. As if it was manageable. But she quickly learned the hard way that none of her schedules worked out as planned. And this time around, she couldn't just fight, kick, bite, or teleport her way out of it. It just kept piling and piling.

Anything she didn't finish today would wait for her tomorrow, patiently, like starving wolves waiting out a lone traveller who climbed a tree for safety. She could feel their hungry yellow eyes and their hunger to devour their prey alive fixated on her. People went hungry, cold, wet, sick, injured. Diplomats, functionaries and officials got annoyed and difficult. Soldiers got hurt and lost morale. Any misstep would cost her an arm and a leg.

The day's exhaustion worked in her favour. You can't be locked in with your thoughts for too long when exhaustion forces you into sleep. Even if it was a light, restless slumber, it was still a welcome respite.

Glimmer locked the door behind her, sealing herself away for the night. Finally, she

got a moment to herself. She looked over at the sink on the right side of her room, and her eyes caught her toothbrush, exactly where she had left it this morning, waiting eagerly to be used. With a sting of guilt, she teleported herself directly onto her bed. Skipping brushing your teeth once every now and then can't be that bad, she figured. She'd brush them in the morning, she promised herself.

It had been another shit day in a series of shit days. Bow and Adora hadn't been as supportive as she had expected them to be. They had different ideas on how to proceed. They disagreed with Glimmer's plans. Instead of supporting her, they joined the ranks of everybody else wanting and needing shit from her. They joined the ranks of shit she had to keep track of on her to-do lists, which contained an innumerable amount of shit items already.

Glimmer had trusted her friends to support her through all this queen and war business. Disagreeing with her felt not supportive at all. She knew they were trying their best and trying to do what they thought was right, but she couldn't help but feel the cold sting of betrayal.

Despite being surrounded by people every minute of her day, Glimmer felt alone. How on Etheria did her mom deal with all this on her own for years? Glimmer didn't let the thought linger on. She didn't have the capacity to deal with Angella being gone right now. Not again. Instead, she went over the next day's schedule while staring at the ceiling, until a knock on the door made her shoot up and stare at it like a deer hearing hunters approach.

"Glimmer, are you awake?" Bow called out from beyond the thick wooden door.

Glimmer tensed into a frozen state. She didn't want to see him right now. She didn't want to see anybody right now. Nor to be seen. She wanted to be alone. Alone, where she didn't have to put up an act of the queen being on top of her game and having everything under control. Her heart was racing. She hadn't turned off the lights. Would Bow figure her out? Could she get away with telling him tomorrow that she had fallen asleep with the lights on?

"I just... I just wanted to wish you a good night. But I guess you're asleep, and I'm just talking to a door, so I'm gonna go now. Good night, Glimmer."

Glimmer heard footsteps receding on the outside. Her shoulders sagged with relief, her fists unclenched their tension. Yet her heart was still relentlessly pounding. She could feel her pulse in her neck and through her ears. Relief turned into anger. Anger into rage. Her heart beat faster and faster.

Why the fuck can't they just leave me alone for a fucking minute for fuck's sake, she screamed internally. She was about to burst. But she couldn't do it here, in her room. She had to keep up appearances. And nobody could know. So she teleported herself into the Whispering Woods.

The first place that came to mind was her and Bow's old secret place, a small clearing not deep inside. They used to meet up at night there, back when they were kids and they sneaked out from home. Bow had just been knocking on her door, so she was certain to be alone there.

She screamed curses. Hit trees. Stomped her feet. Yelled until her voice was hoarse. Why the fuck did everyone decide to be a problem today. Why the fuck didn't anything she tried work. At all. Why the fuck couldn't she do anything fucking right. Why the fuck aren't her friends there for her when she needed them. Why the fuck did her mom have to up and die and leave her with all of this fucking bullshit to deal with. On her own. Why the fuck do these fucking shitheads have to wage war all the fucking time. Aren't they getting that they can't win? That the Rebellion will never cease to fight? Why the fuck are they prolonging this unnecessarily?

She powered herself out completely with a long scream of pure frustration. Exhausted, she teleported herself directly into her bed and curled up around a pillow, falling asleep nearly instantly. Without turning off the lights.

Glimmer locked the door behind her, sealing herself away for the night. Finally, she got a moment to herself. She went over to the bathroom, looking at her pale self in the mirror and the inviting toilet bowl. She decided against it and teleported to her secret place in the forest instead, where she threw up immediately. She hadn't eaten much that evening, so there wasn't much to throw up aside from her stomach

juices. It stung her throat and tongue.

Acidic stench replaced the fresh forest air. Her prolonged dry heaving annoyed her. The retching shot painful convulsions through her stomach muscles, but she didn't mind them very much. Couldn't she just throw up quickly and be done with it? Why must her body be so difficult at times? Still, she was a bit impressed with herself. She had managed to keep it all in for the entire day.

Seventy-two wounded. Fifty-two dead. The Horde had launched a new offensive. Which cost the Rebellion seventy-two wounded. Fifty-two dead. Fifty-two mothers and fathers and parents not returning home. All in just one morning. Fifty-two sons and daughters and children. Fifty-two brothers and sisters and siblings. Fifty-two not seeing another day. Fifty-two not singing songs around campfires. Fifty-two not seeing their children grow up. Fifty-two not reading the book they always wanted to. Fifty-two not planting seedlings in their garden come next spring. Fifty-two not seeing next spring. Fifty fucking two. And the number will keep rising. And that's without counting for the dead soldiers on the Horde's side. They too are people, like Adora. Glimmer threw up nothing again.

They told her about the unexpected attack in an urgent morning meeting. By late afternoon, the aftermath was known. All the while they kept rushing her from meeting to meeting. About useless jabber, as if there weren't people dying at the front that very moment. She had had no time to panic or deal with it. Instead, Glimmer decided on a strategy some general proposed. Reinforce flanks, and send reserve troops to the front. As soon as the front was back under control, they'd send out more medics and roll out a systematic plan to find and evacuate whatever civilian hadn't made it out of there yet. Glimmer was sure the generals and other high-ranking military officers were fucking psychopaths or sociopaths or whatever. Fifty-two dead didn't seem to make a single dent in their mental state. No way normal people just get on with business as usual after hearing that fifty-two of their own died that morning. Fifty-two never cooking dinner again. Fifty-two never cooling off in the lakes and rivers during a summer heat. Fifty fucking two.

Glimmer had been numb and on auto-pilot the entire day. It made staying in control and keeping up appearances manageable, and she felt it was probably best to re-

main that way now as well. She teleported herself back into her room and brushed her teeth, hoping to get the taste of puke out of her mouth. It helped a little, but the sore throat and stomach muscles remained. She walked up to her suspended bed without turning off the lights. Leaving the lights on helped her get up in the morning, before first light. It didn't help with the sleep though, but nowadays she never got a good night of sleep anyway.

That night was no different. Glimmer was woken from a dreamless sleep by her heart pounding as if she had sprinted up the stairs of Brightmoon's tallest tower, gasping for air. She had sweat through her pillows and sheets as if she had been sprinting long distances. To top it off, she felt like throwing up again. But that wasn't new. Glimmer was used to waking up in this manner by now, with feelings of drowning and failing and falling and being hunted by unseen pursuers, faceless problems that needed solutions this very instant, mocking her through their very existence. The urge to throw up as soon as she regained consciousness came along with all that garbage like a bonus a merchant throws in an attempt to sweeten a deal. She had woken up this way for the past few weeks, but despite being used to it, it annoyed her.

The clock on her wall told her that she couldn't have slept for more than three hours. She was exhausted but wide awake, her heart still racing. There would be no more sleep for her that night, she figured. The sweat-drenched bedding wasn't inviting either. So she dragged herself over to her desk to read over remaining reports, where she eventually nodded off, only to be awoken by the guards knocking on her door moments later, waiting to escort her to her first meeting of the day.

Glimmer locked the door behind her, sealing herself away for the night. Finally, she got a moment to herself. She barely noticed her hand shaking while trying to lock the door through the blurry tears in her eyes, which had begun welling up as soon as she had closed the door. She wiped them away as she teleported to her secret hideout in the woods, where she fell over on her arms and knees, on all fours, and tried to throw up. Nothing came out though. She was just heaving and convulsing

uselessly in the dirt.

One hundred and fifty-five. One hundred and fifty-five dead.

Before, soldiers had died defending. Their homes, their friends, their families. They were being attacked by the Horde. But this time, Glimmer had ordered a counteroffensive. The generals had convinced her that it was a good idea. “A worthwhile strategy” they called it. Hollow words, when faced with the consequence of her decision. One hundred and fifty-five. One hundred and fifty-five dead. Following an order she had given. She had ordered one hundred and fifty-five to go fight and die. And they fought and died. They were gone. Because of her. All for a strategy. That might not even pay off later. No strategy is guaranteed to work. But the dead are guaranteed to stay dead.

She tried to throw up again. In the past, it had made her feel better, but that night, her body refused her the catharsis she sought. Silent tears dropped on the ground between her hands. She wasn’t even granted that rotten excuse for relief.

She slammed her fist into the ground. The pain in her knuckles quickly subsided in the numbness that permeated her. All she managed was to let out a few sobs.

“Glimmer?”

Bow, behind her, called out to her as softly as he could, but his voice cracked through the cool night air like a whip. All strength left her, leaving her frozen, while Bow stepped into the faint moonlight from the cover of a tree.

“I didn’t want to startle you. I wanted to talk to you this week, but you keep being overbooked during the day, and I never seem to catch you in your room once your meetings are over.”

His gentle concerned voice sent panic through Glimmer’s bones. Everything inside her was screaming at her to run for her life. But she couldn’t move. She couldn’t even shiver. He slowly approached her.

“I heard you teleport away from your room a couple of times late at night. So I tried my luck with our old hiding spot. And what do you know, here you a-”

Bow stopped dead in his tracks as he noticed the state Glimmer was in. He slowly knelt beside her and put a hand on her shoulder.

"I want to ask you if you're okay, but you clearly aren't. Do you want to talk? Can I help somehow?"

Glimmer, barely having regained basic functioning from a mind filled with screaming thoughts, leaned back and sat on her feet, her gaze fixed on the ground.

"Glimmer, please. I'm really worried about you."

She turned and faced him.

The forest's trees and branches were catching the faint moonlight with their nets of shadows, allowing only a few rays of the pale light to reach into their depth. The woods were adamant to keep their secrets under a veil of darkness. The shadows danced across the ground to the tune of the cool breeze sweeping past branches, never revealing all they concealed. But they permitted Bow to see enough for the sight of Glimmer to carve itself deep into his heart, as gentle as a red hot branding iron marking cow's hides.

Her hair had fallen and was messy. Any trace of her characteristic sparkle had left her. Big silent tears were rolling down her pale, sunken face. Bow had noticed that she had lost some weight over the past few weeks, but he had never seen her cheekbones protrude as pronounced as this before.

And the look she was giving him. By the Old Ones, the look. There was nothing but despair and pain and helplessness to be found in the flickers of her eyes that the dancing shadows let him witness. No hope. No joy. No determination. Just defeat and misery and pain and anguish.

"Glimmer..."

The shock written all over Bow's face dispersed any remaining shred of self-control Glimmer imagined herself to have. She threw herself at his chest and clasped onto his back for dear life.

And finally, she cried.

And cried.

And wailed.

And howled.

With everything she had.

Bow held her tightly and let her cry her soul out. In the years to come, when thinking back on this moment, he could swear that the entire forest remained dead silent that night as if it understood the sorrow and grief of the queen echoing between the trees. He could also swear that he had never heard a sound so heartbreaking as the queen's wails in his arms, neither before nor since.

He ached to reassure her, to console her, but he couldn't find the words. He couldn't find any words. He couldn't tell her it was going to be okay. It was not going to be okay. It was war.

"We're gonna make it through this," is all he could come up with.

Glimmer let out another long howl of agony, sobbing, shaking, further dissolving into the beaten and broken puddle of misery that she was.

Bow couldn't tell how much time had passed when Glimmer finally relaxed her grasp on him, muttering apologies with a broken voice.

"You don't need to apologise for this, Glimmer. Ever."

She squeezed her hug tighter in appreciation.

"We should probably get you to bed soon," Bow suggested. Glimmer nodded into his chest.

"Can you walk?"

She shook her head.

"Alright. I'll carry you then."

Glimmer nodded again, and Bow picked her up gently, making his way towards

the palace.

Glimmer was woken up by the guards knocking on the door, waiting to escort her to the day's first meeting. She was surprised to wake up with daylight shining through her windows. That hadn't happened in what felt like ages. She was even more surprised to wake up cuddled up to Bow. Glimmer smiled. She couldn't resist diving back into his warm embrace for a fleeting moment before getting up and getting ready for the day, as much as she wanted to stay in bed with him.

We're gonna make it through this, she knew. Nothing else was an option. There were no alternatives. So she just as well might not let her mind wander along what-ifs.

Stargazing

Cold. Wet. Sweat? Heart pumping. Dry throat. Jaw wide open. So wide it hurts. Fast breathing. No sound escapes her throat. Unknown place. Heaving. Cramping. Claspings. Muscles on overdrive. Fractions of thoughts overlapping, racing, breaking against her skull.

This is a familiar sensation. She's been here before. A single clear thought emerges, cutting through the din like a bell's ring in a storm.

Breathe.

Catra tries to inhale deeply. It's forced. It's difficult. It's staggered. She manages. Something soft on her legs. Blanket? Yeah, just the blanket.

Breathe.

The second breath is easier to draw. The third even more so. She unclasps her hands from the sheets.

Breathe.

Catra feels herself calming down. The heartbeat pulsating through her ears quiets down into an echo.

As her breath steadies, she feels her fingers aching. She had clasped at the sheets too violently. Her hands are now relaxed, and she moves them away. A quick rub relieves the tension while she takes a look around.

She recognizes the room she's in. The same familiar empty walls, the same familiar metallic ceiling. She wonders why she didn't see it earlier. It's the same place she spent the last couple of days in - the room on the First One's ship Adora came to

get her with.

The room is dark, as always. It doesn't have any windows, and even if it had any, there isn't anything around that would illuminate it in the depths of space they were travelling through. The only light source is a few small blinking lights strewn along the walls. They cut through the darkness, pulsating their red and blue indications in regular intervals, silently whispering their secrets into the dark. The lights tell their tales in a language meant for mechanics and technicians. A language she doesn't speak.

Adora isn't there, Catra notices. Usually, she'd be snoring on the left side of the bed. Or sitting against the wall to the left, pretending to "just have closed her eyes to think".

Usually, whatever that's supposed to be, Catra catches herself thinking.

It's only been a handful of days. That's not enough for "usually" to be a thing. And yet the sight and smell of Adora lying asleep next to her feels so familiar as if they hadn't spent a single day apart in their entire lives. Each time she wakes up and sees Adora asleep next to her, her arms and legs spread all over like the graceless mess she's always been, she *knows* that she isn't dreaming anymore. That the nightmares were over. That the nightmares were just... nightmares.

Which doesn't make any sense. If anything, the part where Adora rescues her from the clutches of Prime should be the dream. Not the horrid tortures she has endured. Not the horrid tortures she keeps enduring in her nightmares. Not the unyielding hands pushing her into the green liquid to repeatedly drown her every other night. No, still being tortured makes way more sense to be the real thing. Adora snoring next to her should be the dream. Laying next to her and watching her sleep should be the dream.

The idea that all of this is some fucked up mind game of Prime's has entered her thoughts several times. But then she sees Adora next to her, either snoring as if she doesn't have a single care in the world or thrashing around as if fighting some battles in her dreams. Like a puppy would after an exciting day in the park. A big, blonde, dorky puppy. Whenever she sees this, somewhere deep inside, Catra

knows that this is the real thing.

Catra feels drops of cold sweat running down her back. Right now, she's glad Adora isn't around. She doesn't want to be seen. Not like this, weak, out of control, vulnerable. She hates it when she gets like this. Whatever "this" is. She hates that she needs more than a single moment to collect herself. So Catra is relieved she's able to get a grip by herself without anybody witnessing her needing to get a grip.

And yet, somehow, she is also disappointed. If Adora had seen her like this, she'd try and talk to her about it. Then Catra wouldn't have to bring it up herself. That makes it easier to talk about it. She sure *didn't* want to talk about it, but somehow she also *did*, and something told her that she *should*. Or maybe wanted to? Which was silly. Very silly. There's no use in talking about these kinds of things. You get a grip, you stop being a whiny little bitch, and you get on with it. You don't strike up a conversation just about a silly bad dream you had. Besides, Adora has done enough already. No need to burden her with more of your own garbage. Your own garbage is supposed to be your own.

The cold sets in quickly. She must've sweat a lot. Her fur feels heavy and damp. Damn those nightmares. Full of green shit and Horde Prime preaching his bullshit. And him reaching, and taking, and doing as he pleases. His cold sterile fingers on her shoulder, on her back, around her neck. Chantings, chantings, hundreds of tiny green eyes blinking through the darkness. Catra shudders. *The nightmares are over*, she assures herself. *It was just a dream*, she tries to comfort herself. *This time*, a tiny voice in the back of her head whispers. *This time, it was just a dream*. Catra shudders again.

The empty walls echo the sound of her breathing right back at her. They close in on her, all high and mighty. They mock her, they do as they please. The sterile dots of light chant in repeating patterns, at their own pace, paying her no heed. Why should they? They were indicator lights. Doing what they were programmed to do. And yet they push in on her like she's the nail sticking out that needs to be hammered into submission. She's not welcome here.

She can't tell whether her thoughts echo across her own skull or the blank walls. Have the walls become her head? Catra needs to get out. She needs a distraction.

Maybe even assurance that the cursed black fingers won't grab her neck the next second when she isn't watching. Fuck it, she could use being in the same room as Adora right now. Everything's fine when Adora's around. So she gets up.

The corridors outside her room are dark and silent too. *The others must be sleeping*, Catra figures, hearing no noises nor voices. She takes extra quiet steps, following the tiny guiding lights on the floors. Catra is always light-footed and rarely makes any noise when walking, but she puts in extra effort now. Everybody on this ship deserves at least that much, having rescued her from the clutches of Prime at their own peril and all that. But more importantly, she doesn't really want to see any of them now. Nor to be seen by any of them.

Passing the empty restroom, she concludes that the only other place Adora would be is the main deck. Catra finds her there, sitting on the floor and staring outside. Adora's seemingly lost in thought, surrounded by a choir of blinking indicator lights and the computer screens around the windows. Catra doesn't want to startle her, so Catra whispers, "Adora?", hoping it is loud enough for her to notice.

It is. Adora turns her head.

"Oh, hey, Catra. I couldn't sleep, so I came here to look at the stars."

"Oh, okay," Catra whispers, rubbing her elbow.

Adora's eyes narrow as she gives Catra an inspecting look. Catra stands still by the entrance, her head lowered, her tail motionless on the ground. No snark, no quips, no witty remarks come from her.

"Are you... okay?" Adora asks hesitantly.

A "no" instantly shoots up inside Catra, but it immediately gets stuck in her throat. She notices herself tense up. Adora's piercing blue eyes shine across the room like searchlights, directed straight at her. They see through her as if her skin is made of glass. *Adora only asked to be nice*, Catra is certain. *She knows already*. Despite her clothes, Catra feels naked.

"Yeah," she lies.

The two women stare at each other, frozen in place.

Get a grip, Catra reminds herself and lets go of her elbow.

“Is stargazing a princesses-only kind of thing? Or can a simple girl join in?”

“Sure,” Adora replies and turns her glance back towards the starry horizon. She seems mesmerised by the starry sight. But Catra recognises the faint wrinkle on Adora’s forehead, betraying the worry she’s trying to hide.

Catra tiptoes over to Adora’s right and sits down next to her, careful to leave what she feels is an appropriate distance between them. Fighting the urge to cling onto her, Catra hugs her own knees. The metallic floor below her is cold. Sometimes Catra thinks she can feel it vibrate as the engines propel them through the voids of space. That night, the floor underneath her feels steady.

Adora keeps looking at the innumerable stars. “I don’t think I’ll ever get used to this,” she says with awe.

Catra inspects her expression, but it remains unchanged, firmly directed towards the glistening stars outside.

“What are you talking about?” Catra asks.

“All these stars. It’s *incredible*.”

Catra takes a good look herself.

“I guess it’s pretty, yeah,” she says, unimpressed. Despite her genuine try, all Catra sees is a bunch of black darkness and a lot of shiny points. Some are blinking, others aren’t. Not much different from the indicator lights, or the guiding lights through the corridors. Except for the colours - the stars don’t blink in blues, reds, or greens. Fucking *greens*. Perhaps she just can’t focus enough with all the annoying thoughts in her head popping up all the time uninvited?

Maybe I’ll figure it out later.

Or maybe Adora’s just weird.

Or maybe I'm just weird.

Or broken, a tiny voice whispers in the back of her head.

The room is filled with the ship's low humming, which does nothing to alleviate Catra's agonising over how to break the silence between them.

"Bow says we're travelling at incredible speed," Adora finally continues to Catra's relief. "He says that at this speed, we could fly a circle around Etheria in a couple of seconds. And that we could fly from Salineas to Brightmoon faster than Glimmer could teleport us."

"I bet Sparkles didn't like that fact."

"We've been going through space at this speed for *days*, Catra. And yet we're still nowhere near home! I've been looking out the window for hours. *Hours*, Catra! But the stars remain where they were. We're not getting anywhere near close to them."

Home. That single word leaves a cold sting between Catra's lungs.

Adora uses that word so carefree.

"Entrapta says that stars are these huge spheres of hot gas. Like, *really* huge. Hundreds and thousands of times larger than entire Etheria."

"How'd she figure that?"

"She found some data on it on Darla's storage systems."

"But they all look so tiny."

"I know, right?" Adora beams.

Adora has this irritating glimmer in her eye again that she gets when she's looking at something she thinks is wonderful. Back in the day, Catra would've rolled her eyes at it. At this moment, however, Catra's stomach drops at the sight of it. She can't believe it's still there. After all this time, it still remains a part of her? After all this, some parts of the Adora she knew as a kid are still there, alive and well?

Maybe I didn't manage to destroy just about everything.

Please let it be so.

Memories of days long gone come flooding in. The same shiny look five-year-old Adora gives her from below, on the ground, after Catra shows her how to climb that tree. Adora seeing a waterfall for the first time. Adora tasting wild berries Catra finds in the Whispering Woods. Adora -

Catra turns her head back towards the stars, hoping Adora doesn't notice the sting in her eye. She really doesn't want to have to explain tears right now. She probably wouldn't even know how to. Is that a happy tear? She hadn't expected to see Adora like this, nor that it would hit her this deep. Or is it born from grief? Memories of the distant past weigh heavy on her these days. Especially memories of those rare carefree moments from their childhood - they feel like promises life has made and didn't keep. Probably never even intended to keep. Promises she was robbed of.

You robbed yourself of, a tiny voice in her head says.

"But apparently they're so insanely huge," Adora continues. "And hot. And even more insanely far away."

"Huh," is all Catra can add. She gives it another honest try. She looks and looks at the stars, but she just can't see anything of the hugeness Adora is talking about. It's just blackness and a ton of small shiny points to her.

"And yet there they are. Just... sitting there. Just doing their own thing. Not a single worry in their lives. They've been there all along. They haven't even noticed an entire planet being locked away in a different dimension. All they do is just exist and shine. That's all they do, all day long. Just being stars, and just shining away. Like nothing else matters, or has mattered, or will matter."

"So they never change?" Catra frowns.

"That's what it looks like."

"Then why do you keep staring at them? Haven't you seen what's to be seen?"

"I don't know. I can't look away. They seem so... grand. So... beyond me, beyond it all. And that makes me feel small. In a good way! Nothing I do, nothing we do, matters to them. They're just out there. Millions of miles away, shining on. If we died tomorrow, they'd keep shining. If we lived for another hundred years, they'd keep shining. They don't care! We don't matter to them. They're just... being them. And somehow being this little small nothing in the face of all these infinite huge stars makes me feel... grand again? Does that make any sense?"

"Not really, no."

"It's like they're... at peace. Beyond it all. Gigantic and calm. Whatever happens, however things turn out, they're at peace with it. They don't bother, and it doesn't bother them. And that gives me peace of mind as well, somehow. Like I'm part of it all? A tiny part in a huge huge world? All the things I'm scared of and worry about, whatever happens, however it ends - these stars are gonna keep doing their thing. Just... doing their thing. It makes me feel like everything's gonna be okay somehow, however it turns out, you know?"

Catra doesn't know. But something else concerns her more.

"You're scared?"

Adora looks at her fearlessly with a courageous smirk, but Catra can see the exhaustion behind her eyes.

"Yes, Catra, I'm scared. All the time," she whispers. "All the time. Sometimes I'm so scared I can't think straight. Like when Prime took you and Glimmer. Or when he presented you to me, chipped and obeying his commands, speaking through you, willing to make you jump off the ledge, to hurt you." Her voice cracks. "I thought I was gonna lose my mind back there, Catra."

Catra doesn't move a muscle. Her throat is dry. She's helpless to do anything but stare at Adora, as useless as the faint deep humming of the engines or the occasional beeps coming from the computers that fill the silence.

Adora clears her throat and sighs. "We keep losing things we hold dear. We keep losing people, friends, family, our homes, our livelihoods. Every time I have to

make a decision I fear I made the wrong one.” Her voice is low and tired. Every word she says sounds like it takes tremendous effort.

Catra sinks further into her knees. The idea of a scared Adora weighs heavy on her. How much did she contribute to that, Catra wonders? But Adora gives her the faint smile of someone who has accepted a burden as their own and turns back towards the starry horizon like it’s nothing.

“Do you sometimes wish things were different?” Catra mumbles.

Adora looks at her again, surprised. “Yes, Catra. I do. All the time. Don’t you?”

“Yeah. I do too.”

Adora gives her a patient, expecting look, but Catra’s lips remain shut.

“The truth is, Catra, I’m tired,” Adora continues with another sigh. “I’m tired of fighting. And of battle. And of war. Usually, I don’t get to be tired. There’s too much to be done to get to feel tired. But here, on this ship, with nothing else to do all day, it catches up with me. I’m just so tired of it all. Even just the thought of it. And yet it waits for me as soon as we arrive.”

“I get that. I’m tired too.”

“I can imagine.”

Adora lays down and crosses her hands on her belly, staring at the ceiling. Catra does the same, but she also uses the opportunity to close the distance to Adora, careful not to actually touch her.

The ceiling was full of blinking indicator lights too, sparkling in red, green, and blue in their perfectly regular patterns. They are busy, working. Blindly fulfilling their purpose, talking in unspoken languages.

“Catra?”

“Hm?”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“Do you ever think about the future?”

Catra thinks for a moment.

“Not really, no. I’m usually too busy with getting by.”

As Adora keeps watching the ceiling, Catra senses that she’s waiting to be asked the same question in return. So she gives it a try.

“Do you?”

“Recently, I have, yeah.”

“So, what were you thinking about?”

“I don’t know. It was nothing... specific. There is so much to think about. So much to take care of and to be done. There’s all the rebuilding we need to do. And reorganising. I gotta make sure everybody’s safe. And accounted for. And that there is enough food available for everyone. And that it gets distributed efficiently enough. And that there is enough shelter. And medicine. And healers.”

Catra shrinks again. This time, she knows exactly how much she has contributed towards Adora’s concerns. She hopes Adora won’t bring it up right now. Or ever, for that matter.

“But after that,” Adora continues, “after that... I have no idea. There is so much we could do. So much to choose from. So much! Rest? Travel? Explore? Visit other planets? Like the one the Star Siblings came from? See other stars? Honestly, I wouldn’t know how or what to pick!”

Catra thinks about it, perhaps even for the first time in this way. A life after war? After military and battle? After the Horde? There has never been an ‘after the Horde’ in her past plans. A life after violence? Maybe even... Safe? That... that actually sounds nice. It’s a really nice thought to have. It warms her like the campfires in the Whispering Woods used to during survival trainings.

“I don’t think I’ve ever thought about an ‘after’ before,” replies Catra. “At least not

in a good way.”

“Wanna give it a try?”

“Hm, I don’t think so,” Catra replies after considering it for a second. The urge to keep her actual wishes and dreams concealed remains insurmountable. What remains unsaid can’t be taken from you. Or used against you.

“Come on, it’ll be fun! What do you wanna do? Where do you wanna go?” Adora turns towards her, radiating with giddy excitement.

Catra gives in, remembering how fuzzy the previous train of thought of the future has made her feel. She lets her mind wander. No more fighting. No battling. No strategy meetings. No conquering. No violence. She feels lighter once more. Like a heavy rock she didn’t know she carried has just been lifted off her back. Freedom. Warm summers. Tranquillity. Birds chirping. A place on her own, maybe? No, *definitely*. No more sharing bunk beds with twenty other soldiers in a room. Ever. And no more sharing her shower and toilet with others. *Privacy*.

What else? Enjoying morning coffee and breakfast without hiding from anybody who’s bellowing orders? Without bellowing orders herself? The thought makes her feel even lighter. Heck, why not skip breakfast altogether and sleep in until noon!

What would she even do all day? Go for walks? Chat with the neighbours? Plant stuff in her garden? Hang on, a garden? Where did that come from? But why not, a garden sounds nice and peaceful and joyous. Watching things grow instead of being destroyed is a mesmerisingly attractive prospect. A Catra growing and raising plants, instead of a Catra burning down forests? What an idea!

Maybe she’d go for a stroll through town, saying ‘hi’ and ‘bye’ to everyone she knows with a little smile and wave? Maybe not that, she doesn’t really know anyone outside of the Horde yet.

But they know me, the tiny voice in the back of her head says, and her heart sinks.

Yes, they know her. She has been the face and the cause of too much destruction

and damage. There's no way she is going to be forgiven and forgotten. There's no way Etherians would tolerate her presence. And even if they didn't just lock her up for eternity somewhere, there's no way she would encounter smiley happy faces on the streets. They would look at her with fear and hate. Maybe even disgust. In fact, *probably* even disgust. They would have the same expressions carved on their faces as the cadets in the Horde. Strolling through town, waving and smiling? Not an option. She had made her bed, now she must lie in it.

And you'd deserve it, the tiny voice says. *You've earned it*.

"Somewhere far away, I guess," Catra finally answers truthfully. "Far away from swords and boots and tanks." *Somewhere where nobody would know me nor what I did* - she keeps that last thought to herself.

"That sounds nice. I think I'd like that too."

I don't think I can take you there with me, Adora. You don't deserve more of the mess I made.

"Although Brightmoon would be nice as well. I would get to see Bow and Glimmer every day, and the other princesses too when they came to visit. But exploring Etheria and other places sounds like a lot of fun too! There is so much we could go and see and do together!"

Catra wants to tell Adora that she hopes her wishes come true and that they have tons of fun on their adventures, but Adora doesn't give her a chance to do so.

"All I know," Adora whispers, "is that I can't stand the thought of a future without you in it. Whatever I do, wherever I am after this war is over, I want you there with me." She makes that last sentence sound like something between a statement and a plea as if she hasn't decided what it was herself.

To Catra, this sounds surreal. Did she just hear that right? Her chest tightens and her shoulders tense up, but her tail gives her away as it flicks outwards, grazing Adora's thigh. Oh why, oh why didn't she place it on the other side when she had laid down? Away from Adora? Frightened about what to expect, Catra slowly turns her head left and is met with Adora's warm gaze and soft smile.

This scares her even more.

Adora slowly extends her right arm towards Catra, her palm open, and rests it close to Catra's hand, all the while looking straight into her widening eyes. The invitation is too sweet for pride and reservation to have a chance to kick in; Catra has come to the main deck looking for Adora, starving for her presence, but now Adora's offering so much more than she's hoped to find that night. Before she realises what exactly she's doing, Catra places her hand into Adora's, who immediately clasps it firmly.

"It's been too long, Catra. I don't want us to be apart again," she whispers. "Ever. I was so scared I would lose you for real back there, Catra. So fucking scared." Adora's voice cracks as starlight shimmers in her watery eyes.

Catra has many thoughts. The problem is that none of these thoughts is a complete one. They race and overlap, fight each other for dominance, shouting over each other, resulting in no more than noise and flickers of half-constructed images.

She sees Adora's chest rise and fall as she breathes. How many breaths were that now since she finished speaking? Four? Five? Too many! Fuck! Fuck! Anything is better than silence! Anything!

"Since when did you start cursing?" she clumsily tries, making sure not to let go of Adora's hand. She doesn't have the slightest intention to do so, but she wants to make sure nonetheless. *Extra sure*. She can't have her slip away.

Again, a tiny voice in the back of her head adds.

Adora smiles faintly. "I guess I picked it up from Glimmer."

Crisis averted.

"I see," Catra says. A few wordless seconds later, Catra decides to double down on her 'words are better than no words' strategy.

"As long as you don't start sparkling someday."

Adora chuckles, and Catra feels like the funniest comedian in the entire universe.

“She’s a good one,” Catra adds earnestly.

“You mean Glimmer?”

“Yeah, Sparkles. She seems like a good person. And a good friend.”

“Yes, she is. After all that’s been said and done, she’s a great friend. And a great person.”

“I think she loves you guys a whole ton. Back on Prime’s ship, she wouldn’t shut up about you.”

“I think so too. I’m sure both Bow and I love her too.”

“Yeah,” Catra says absent-mindedly. *Back on Prime’s ship.* The words echo through her skull.

A dark pit opens in her stomach and spreads towards her head like black flames devouring everything in their path. It crawls towards her arms and toes.

Back on Prime’s ship. These words were enough to project the long white corridors before her eyes. A choir of clones’ steady footsteps resound behind her. And in front of her. And from her sides. A firm hand clutches her shoulder. The pool of burning green liquid marches towards her.

They’re not here. You’re lying on the floor. You’re just imagining things.

Her breathing becomes faster. She shifts her eyes away from the mechanic blinking lights onto the stars outside. The endless void between them extends towards her. It threatens to engulf her as she rapidly shrinks and falls. She closes her eyes. She keeps falling.

“Catra?”

You’re not falling. You’re lying on the floor.

“Catra, you’re squeezing me a little too tight there,” Adora says, wriggling her hand in Catra’s.

Her body is not listening to her. No limb obeys her command. She keeps falling

through the floor. The terrible hand on her shoulder is relentlessly pulling her further down, towards the green pool. She wants to scream but has forgotten how. She wants to run, but her legs are not there. Her breathing is fast and shallow.

“Catra? What’s wrong?”

She lets go of Adora’s hand and clutches onto the floor for dear life. A sensation on her cheek startles her, making her twitch and open her eyes wide to find herself staring into two ocean-blue eyes.

“Look at me,” Adora’s soft voice emerges from underneath those blue eyes. “I’ve got you,” Adora says, keeping her gently placed hand on Catra’s cheek. “Just keep looking at me. You’re okay. You’re fine. I’ve got you.”

Catra locks in on those eyes. Those same eyes had looked up at her from the ground when she showed her how to climb a tree. Those same eyes had looked at her in awe while tasting wild berries for the first time. Those same eyes that she had been waking up to see these past few days.

“I’ve got you. Breathe with me. In, and out, and in, and out.” Adora moves her hand up and down in an exaggerated fashion in tandem with her instructions, prompting Catra to take slow, deep breaths.

With everything going on in her head, doing what Adora wants her to seems like the right idea. At least it’s an idea. It’s the only thing resembling a clear thought she has right now. Catra tries to breathe with her, as well as she can. As soon as she remembers how to, that is.

“There you go. You’re doing great. In, and out, and in, and out,” Adora continues, growing quieter as Catra’s breath eventually steadies.

The noises and images subside. Gradually unclenching, Catra begins to feel Adora’s breath on her face and the callouses on Adora’s sword hand against her cheek.

“You back with me now?”

Catra nods silently.

“Okay. Good. You doing okay?”

Catra nods again.

“Do you need anything?”

Catra shakes her head.

“Do you wanna go back to bed?”

Catra shakes her head again.

“Alright,” Adora says calmly and lays back down next to her, looking at the ceiling.

The more Catra gathers herself, the more the exhaustion spreads in her. Every single limb of hers weighs a ton. Her heart is still pumping as if she just finished running a marathon. And finally, the humiliation sets in. Losing control like that. In front of fucking Adora. What the fuck.

She chances a glance at her. Adora has put her arms under her head and lays there with closed eyes. Catra can’t help but wonder what she’s thinking. Or actually, fear what she’s thinking. What does Adora think of her now? Does she think she’s weak? Or sick? Or broken?

Does she know? Did she figure it out? Why isn’t she saying anything?

“Are you... Are you...” Catra stammers. Her voice is hoarse. Her throat hurts.

As Adora opens an eye, curiosity and fear leave Catra to let embarrassment back in.

“I’m sorry,” Catra mumbles.

“Don’t be,” Adora replies. “Nothing to be sorry about having a panic attack.”

Is that what that was?

“What?” Adora adds, noticing Catra’s questioning look. “It’s not the first panic attack I’ve seen. It’s okay, don’t worry about it. No need to apologise for that.”

The ship’s low humming fills the room again, interrupted only by distant infre-

quent beeps from some machinery. The lights on the ceiling keep blinking as if nothing has happened at all. The same regular intervals, the same blue, red, and green lights.

The least she can do is some damage control.

“Are you...” Catra whispers as she slumps back down on the floor, “Can we not talk about this? Ever?”

“I guess,” Adora shrugs, but the wrinkle on her forehead returns with a vengeance. “I mean, I’d like to know what’s going on. I wanted to let you recover first before asking. But I never could get anything out of you unless you wanted me to anyway, so I don’t think I’m gonna push my luck now. I’m too tired for that.”

Catra opens her mouth, unsure what to say.

“But for the record: I am worried about you.”

Ugh. Great. She’s made her worry again. Enough to even say so. As if her worry-wrinkle doesn’t betray her already. Well done, Catra.

“I’m... sorry,” Catra says.

“Don’t worry about it.” Adora turns towards the stars again.

Deep dissatisfaction seizes Catra. This situation is not what she has wanted. At all. She has come here to be in the same room as Adora, but instead, she has made a fool of herself, an embarrassing display, and to top it off, she has made her worry. And Adora won’t even push her on that.

The urge to talk begins boiling Catra’s insides. Not just say things, but *talk*. She wants to tell her. She wants to vomit it out like a poison that’s been eating her for too long. *All* of it. She wants to scream her lungs out about how deathly afraid she still is. About how shaken and insecure and broken she feels. About how she’s barely keeping herself together. About how she needs help, a friend, a place to feel safe. She hates herself for not being able to say any of it. She hates herself for having the urge to talk in the first place. She hates herself for being needy and shattered.

Just shut up about it. Your garbage is your own to deal with. Leave Adora out of it. You've humiliated yourself enough for one night.

But I want to. I want her to know.

But then she'll know. She'll know what a mess you are. She'll know that you're broken. Nobody likes a broken toy.

Well, maybe she should know. Maybe she deserves to know.

She doesn't deserve to deal with more of your bullshit.

But she deserves to know. So she can make plans for her future without me in it.

But I want to be in it.

Then she deserves to know what she's signing up for.

You've embarrassed yourself enough for one night.

And I survived. I'll survive a little more.

"Adora...?" Catra breaks the silence.

"Yes?"

"Can we maybe... talk?" Catra asks foot-draggingly while reaching for Adora's hand again.

"Of course -"

Catra makes a quick decision. She really doesn't want Adora to see her face while it's happening, so she moves closer to her and buries her face into her shoulder, interrupting her mid-sentence.

"I'm scared too, Adora. Fucking terrified."

Catra feels Adora freeze up momentarily, but then she gently strokes Catra's palm in her hand while she wraps her other arm around her. With Catra's long hair gone, Adora can hold her back unobstructed.

"I don't want to be," Catra sobs. "I want to be gone. Somewhere far away from all this. Somewhere out of anybody's reach. Somewhere no one can find and catch me and lock me up. Or make me do horrible things. Or do horrible things to me. Somewhere where I'm not hated. Or hunted. Somewhere where I can sleep. Where I don't feel like being drowned from the moment I wake up. And I want to beat the shit out of him and be done with his ass, but these fucking nightmares keep haunting me and messing with my head."

"Did you have a nightmare tonight too?" Adora asks softly after Catra remains quiet for too long.

"Yeah."

"I'm sorry, Catra."

"Don't be, It's not your fault."

Catra puts her right arm around Adora's waist and clings on tightly.

"Just, don't go. Don't leave me. Please," Catra whimpers.

Adora tightens her hold. "I won't. I'm not going anywhere, Catra."

"You promise?"

Adora moves her hand from Catra's lower back to her shoulder blades and places her chin on Catra's head.

"I promise."

"Even if the entire world hates me?"

"Even then. I'm not letting go of you."

"Please," Catra whimpers.

"I promise."

Catra clutches her fingers into Adora's clothes, careful enough not to hurt her. She can feel Adora's chest rising and sinking with every breath she takes. She can feel

her heartbeat against her forehead, pulsating through Adora's neck, and the strong muscular arms enveloping her being gentler and softer than they had any business to be.

They hold each other closely, enveloped by the engine's deep humming and faint starlight. The indicator lights above them sing their ever-repeating song of blinks. Only timid beeping signals arise from the computers in the room as if they're trying not to disturb the passengers.

"How do you do it, Adora?" Catra mutters. "How do you deal with all this fucking fear?"

"Well, usually I don't," Adora admits. "Usually I just keep pushing until it's over and done. Bow calls it the 'head-through-the-wall approach'. But these days, I've been stargazing."

"Huh?"

"I'm serious. Look." Adora turns on her back and points to the window, while making sure to keep holding onto Catra's hand.

"I've been watching the stars. Just look at them. They're all at peace, they're all unconcerned with whatever we've got going on. Whatever happens, they'll shine on. Whatever happens, it'll be ok. They'll be there. They'll be calm. They'll be shining."

Catra looks. And she sees what looked like the same bunch of stars not giving a shit about any of them that had been there since she entered the room.

"Seriously?"

"Yeah, seriously," Adora replies.

Catra looks at the stars again, and then back at Adora with narrowing eyes.

"Is this a prank? Are you pranking me right now?"

"No! I mean it!"

“Well, I don’t see it.”

“Just give it a minute. Dive into the experience.”

Catra snorts. ” ‘dive into the experience’? ”

“What’s funny about that?”

“You’re such a dork.”

“Maybe I am. Sue me.”

“Where did you get that from? Did you go snorkelling in Salineas or something?”

“It’s just an expression, Catra.”

“Yeah, no shit. The lamest expression I’ve heard in years.”

“Oh, you can hear with those things? I thought those big ears were just for decoration. And for when we need an extra pair of signalling flags.”

“Those big ears are going to give your face a good slap if you keep making fun of them.” Catra wiggles them, failing to make them appear threatening, even as a joke.

“And signal a tank battalion to switch manoeuvres in the process?”

“You’re just jealous your ears aren’t magnificent and fluffy.”

“They *are* fluffy,” Adora agrees, brushing along Catra’s ear.

“Hey, no touching!” Catra grins.

“If your ears are not for touching, then why are they so soft?” Adora keeps stroking her ear.

“To trick princesses into scratching them.”

“So you *do* just want them scratched?”

“No, you dork. They lure princesses like you into a false sense of security. And then I kidnap them.”

“And then what?”

“And then I take you somewhere secret and far away. Where it will be just the two of us. And your punishment for making fun of my glamorous ears will be that you have to scratch them every day. Actually, three times a day, every day. Until you admit how majestic they are.”

“Oh no, how horrible. Anything but that,” Adora chuckles, pushing her arm under Catra’s head so she can reach behind it to scratch her other ear.

“I missed this, you know?” Adora sighs.

“What, being called a dork?”

“No silly. This. Just the two of us, bantering through the night.”

“Oh. Right. Good thing I asked, I was about to call you a dork every day from now on.”

“How kind of you.”

They giggle. Catra lays her head on Adora’s chest.

“I missed this too. Probably more than I’d ever admit. Don’t tell anyone I said that”, she adds, raising her head. “Actually, they wouldn’t believe you anyway.”

“You’d be surprised what they’re willing to believe.”

“Adora...”

“Don’t worry. Your secret is safe with me.”

Adora reaches over to take Catra’s hand back into hers. Catra feels Adora’s arm move and awaits her hand with her fingers spread out, ensuring they would interlock as Adora’s hand reaches hers. They lay there on the hard cold floor in a soft embrace.

Growing weary of the ceiling’s indicator lights’ rhythmical shouts through the darkness, Catra chances another glance at the stars through the windows in front of them. There they are again, a sea of still, shimmering dots quietly illuminating

the galaxy they are passing through. Unwanting. Uncaring. Unchanging. Silent, unreachable watchers of everything that has been, is, and will be.

Watchers. That's what they are.

Funny. I'm watching the watchers. Catra smirks.

They see me, and I see them. We watch each other.

A sense of belonging spreads through Catra. She, Adora, the stars - they're all the same right now: Watchers. Mere witnesses of time's passing as they drift through the void of space. All of them - in their own way - are nothing but a tiny part of the endless vastness, watching quietly from afar.

What a strange sensation it is to feel related to the pretty little lights on the other side of the window! It tingles in her lower back, and Catra feels big, grand even. Like one of the pretty lights out there. Like part of it all.

As time passes, Catra notices that the stars remain motionless, and strangely, that comforts her. Nothing she does, nothing anybody does, will make them move. Nothing. Not even what has been done already. They don't care about who she has been, or what she has done. To them, the past doesn't matter. And right now, the past doesn't matter to Catra either. Right now, there is only right now. And right now, she's stargazing with Adora. Catra grins.

Nothing she does, nothing anybody does, will make the stars move, she realises anew. The stars do their own thing. Forever. They want nothing from her, nothing with her. They are just what they are, and they let be, whatever *be* is.

That's a new idea - being let *be*. An entirely unfamiliar sensation. Liberating and energising - the mere thought of it tempts her to leap into action and move entire mountains. But somehow, it's also terrifying. The same sort of terrifying as having to find your way through the woods without a compass and map. But in an exciting way. She couldn't help but *be* excited.

If she could, *what* would she be?

Not if. When.

'Be' could be this, Catra imagines.

'Be' could be spending an eternity in Adora's arms. Stargazing together. Feeling safe and wanted.

The thought warms Catra from head to toe. It makes her tail tingle.

'Be' could be that garden.

'Be' could be our garden.

A long-forgotten joy washes over her, rife with giddiness and impatience, shimmering just like the stars outside.

Perhaps stargazing has something to it after all, she thinks and smirks.

As the ship continues its journey through the endless sea of stars, Catra lets Adora's heartbeat and the ship's humming lull her into daydreams of what one day would come to be.