

## **The Story of Prim and Faith**

Prim walked the road. She had been walking for aeons; for so long that time passing had lost its weight. She had walked ragged and tattered so many shoes and boots and sandals and wrappings that she had lost count. Thusly she strut on, bare-footed and ever-marching, bent towards the horizon and accustomed to the dirt and dust between her toes and the callouses and cuts and blisters and bruises in her skin, the pain and aches her one and only constant companion on this blessedly accursed road; And yet she walked on.

It was in this way that she made across the Wheel's rim steadily when the winter's frosts and its snow's weight overtook her as she marched along a river. She walked on bravely, of course, and she did so for a while, but her weary body, battered by the elements and her incessantly strenuous journey, finally succumbed as the winter was nearing its end. Thus, she was found by chance, shivering and barely conscious in the depths of white snow, by a woman living in a nearby village. The woman hurriedly called for her husband, and together they carried Prim to their homestead and placed her before the hearth. Then she wrapped Prim in warm blankets and fed her fragrant teas and broth cooked of herbs and bones and onions and honey until the poor thing stopped shivering and warmth flowed through her hands and cheeks again.

It took Prim two more days to recover, throughout which the woman, whom they called Faith, looked after her and fed and clothed her. On the third day, Prim knelt before her and thanked her profusely for the kindness she was shown, for there was no finer daughter.

"A-oo," Faith cried out and folded her hands. "Get up, child," said the small woman hastily. Her stern features, shaped by the harsh severity of a farmer's life as war

had swept the lands not too long ago, became disarmingly assertive as naturally as she would draw breath. “We can’t have that, you kneeling on the kitchen floor like that. What would the people think if they saw?”

Prim had no answer to that, for she had thought it custom, but Faith let her no opportunity to answer anyway.

“What were you looking to achieve in the first place, marching in winter’s cold like that?” Faith continued.

“I walk the road,” said Prim quietly.

“Do you now?” said Faith. “And why is that?”

“To see its end,” said Prim.

“Its end? Its end can wait. First, eat and get well, child. The end can wait.”

And before Prim could reply, Faith pushed a bowl of stew into her hands. “Eat now,” Faith urged, and Prim did, gratefully so.

The next day, when Prim donned her vela and her greatknife as she readied to leave, Faith looked her up and down and said, “Girl, what nonsense is this?”

“It is time for me to leave,” said Prim. “I have taken too much of your hospitality already, and the road calls for me.”

“A-oo,” Faith cried out and clasped her hands before her mouth, “How could we have that? We can’t have that! The road’s going nowhere! And, besides, the road’s no place for a young girl to walk alone in the first place. You are not going anywhere, girl, and most definitely not before the snows thaw. And we’ll see about after. The road is no place for a young girl to be travelling by herself, you know! What would the people say! Now sit by the fire and warm your feet, breakfast will be ready soon, and that’s that!”

And Prim, disarmed stiff, obeyed quietly and sat by the fire with Faith’s husband and daughter, and that was that.

“If you’re that restless,” said Faith as she shoved a bowl of wheat boiled in goat’s milk

into Prim's hands, "you can help around the house a little. YISUN knows there's so much to be done all the time. Frankly, the state of this house is an embarrassment; we can't have that, but we can only do so much in a day. And may you forgive me, but we did not expect your arrival."

Prim looked around the humble home, which she had thought neat and spotless. Faith and her husband were by no means rich, far from it; but they had a roof over their head and food and firewood to last the winter. They had a small daughter, and they had each other, and they were grateful for it and yearned for little else. Such was the life of people who had known the dread of poverty and need in their lives and had learned the right lessons from it.

Prim, still feeling remnants of the freeze in her bones, had to admit to herself that she was indeed not too eager to step away from the hearth just yet. Besides, just as Faith had said, the road would go nowhere. It could wait. Surely a short rest would be no harm, Faith had added, and Prim had to agree, and a weary bit of her wanted to agree. And so Prim happily picked up a broom and swiped the floors and cooked meals and washed the pots and dishes and the clothes alongside Faith.

Prim was skilled in the labours of running a household all too well from running her father's house, so it was no great trouble to her. But she was not familiar with Faith's way of doing things, for Faith ran her household tightly and neatly. Everything had to be done the right and proper way, for that was how things were done. There couldn't be any other way, as we couldn't have that. Hence all the pots and pans and dishes and bowls were always shined and stacked neatly, and whatever few little trinkets and decorations and otherwise purposeless things she had lying around the house for her enjoyment were dusted and cleaned twice weekly, and so despite all the dust and mud that came with rural life there was always something sparkling or shining in the house that would catch the eye. And when it was time to eat, a cloth had to be placed on the table first. And when it was time to leave the house, Faith would always wear a scarf on her head, for that was custom and that was how things were done, and Prim didn't mind wearing one as well, which she borrowed from Faith. When cooking, Faith would rarely deviate from the old recipes her mother had taught her, and she knew by heart which days one was supposed to fast and which days not, and she knew by heart which days the priests had

said were holy and on which no work was to be done, and so they rested on these days and played with her daughter.

Prim would look after their daughter, too, and gladly so, as the little one quickly made her way into her heart. Prim would play with her and watch her and teach her to read and write and tell her stories from afar; And Faith's husband showed Prim how to look after the goats they had and how to milk them; And in the evenings they would sit together by the hearth and sing songs and tell stories, and so the winter went by quickly in good company by the small fire.

And as the frost began to thaw, Prim came along with Faith's husband to the market, where they traded sacks of wheat for other seeds to plant that year. Then their daughter caught a cold, and Prim stayed until she recovered and looked after the little one worriedly, for she had come to harbour much fondness for the child. And then it was time to work the fields and Faith asked Prim to join them in their backbreaking work, for they had need for another pair of hands, and Prim helped all too gladly and learned to plough the fields and to sow the seeds and to tend to the trees; And before all summer's work was done it was high time to look after the harvest and reap and make preparations for winter; And so it was winter again when the necessities of field work had died down and Prim first thought of putting the road under the soles of her feet again.

"Out of question!" said Faith, "Winter is not the time to be travelling! Especially for a girl on her own! And you've worked the fields all year to leave now, like this, empty-handed? We can't have that! What would the people say? A-oo!" and she folded her hands in front of her. "We can't have that, and that's that!"

And even though Prim tried to object, that turned out to be... that.

So the second winter passed, and soon spring came carrying the sun's warmth and with the sun's warmth came the farm and field work, and so it was autumn's harvest in no time again, which quickly turned into winter again. And the following spring they worked the fields again and looked after the goats and raised the child and ran a home together and joined in village life; Thus Prim helped mending fences and herding sheep and goats and joined in the humble feasts and celebrations they put on every now and then and she looked after the children and taught them to read

and write, which was a skill they may not have had much use for, but it wouldn't hurt either; And she was much loved in the community and she loved them as well, and they would sit by the fire in the evenings and talk and laugh and worry and advise each other together.

And each spring, for Faith would not have her leave in winter's frosts, Prim thought of the road again, but then she thought of Faith and her husband and her child and all the work that was to be done, and she thought to herself that one more year wouldn't hurt, and so she stayed, and so the years passed by, and soon enough Faith's daughter had grown into a woman of her own and found herself a husband. They married, and she moved into his home and soon gave life to two children of her own, and there was much joy. "A-oo!" cried out Faith and folded her hands, "What a blessing, what a blessing!"

With two grandchildren to look after, time went by even more quickly, especially since the two were little rascals, and so the years flew by, and with the years, Faith's youth followed. Too soon, or so Prim felt, Faith's hair went white and her back bent and her strength waned and her movements slowed. She looked at her worriedly, but Faith just shook her head. "A-oo!" she laughed, "That is what age does, child, did you not know this? Worry not. This is the way things are and the way things are supposed to be."

But Prim did not feel that this was the way things were supposed to be, and when a few, too few years later Faith caught a cough which wouldn't leave her, Prim knew with certainty that this was all wrong. But the healers could do nothing and the holy men could do even less, and the cough wouldn't leave Faith, and eventually she couldn't leave her bedding, and so all too soon Faith left her husband and her Prim behind.

They made her a coffin of solid wood, as was the proper way of doing things. A holy man spoke his holy words and spread holy smoke above it, as was the proper way of doing things. Then the coffin was carried in silence by six men behind the grieving procession, as was the proper way of doing things. She was laid in the ground, whereupon the holy man spoke some more holy words, as was the proper way of doing things. Finally, they buried her, Prim dropping a handful of dirt upon

the coffin and praying for the ground to rest lightly upon her, as was the proper way of doing things. Then they placed flowers upon the mound and lit candles, as was the proper way of doing things, and when their tears dried up somewhat, they left for their homes.

All this was wrong, Prim felt. She had thought that she knew death, having carried her father's corpse on her back across half the Wheel's rim, but this was different. These weren't chains she was glad to be rid of, but tethers torn from her heart against her will. That day's sun had risen on a world unrecognisable from the previous day's one; It had risen and had heated the rocks and the grass and the wheat and the dirt, yet had lost all its warmth.

"There's nothing to be done," said Faith's husband, "This is the way things are." He lit a candle in their home, which would stay alight for forty days, as was custom. To ease the departure of Faith's flame, they said.

"Forty days?" Prim said, "Then I haven't much time."

And with that, she bolted through the door and ran as fast as she could, not even donning her vela nor her greatknife nor her scarf. In her haste, she did not care for the road nor its machinations; she just ran as fast as her feet carried her.

First, she ran to a temple close by and asked the priests therein for advice. "Our flame has once been YISUN and shall return to YISUN eventually, goddess," they told her. "That is the way things are."

But Prim thought this wrong, so she rushed to a big city, which was known to host a myriad of learned people and scholars. There, she begged them for advice. "We tell stories from days untold. Stories of great heroes," some said, "great heroes who have done great deeds. In turn, the gods raised them to the heavens and made them one of their own, and so they achieved immortality."

"Can it be done?" asked Prim.

"No," they said and shook their heads. "Those are but stories. There are many like it; Some speak of an afterlife, some speak of underworlds or heavens, some speak of judgements and punishments and rewards. They're but stories told in olden times.

Leave the dead where they are. Life is for the living; Nothing good will come from it if you try.”

But Prim thought this wrong, and so she leapt and hurried to YISUN’s speaking house, where only a few gods were gathered, for YISUN was not present and none knew where they’d find the Lord of Lords. There, Prim dropped to her knees and begged them for advice with folded hands. “The human flame was a mistake,” they told her. “Once gone, it’s gone. It wasn’t meant to be that way, but it is. There’s nothing to be done.”

But Prim thought this wrong, and so she stormed out and scrambled towards the edge of the Wheel, where it was known for a monastery to lie hidden deep in insurmountable mountains and where monks most wise and learned were told to live. There, Prim dropped to her knees and begged them for advice with folded hands raised high above her head.

“The human flame is an ever-changing one,” they told her. “It is ever restless and ever taking new shape. Hence, eventually, it will take the shape of nothing, too. This is known, and this is as things should be, and this is as things always have been. It is this property of the flame to make humans what they are. There is nothing to be gained by changing change itself.”

“But can it be done?” Prim asked.

“No,” they said. “It cannot be done.”

And once again Prim thought this wrong, but the cursed Wheel had spun and the forty days had nearly passed, and so she returned hastily to Faith’s grave in unwilling defeat. She made it just in time for the holy man to spread holy smoke in Faith’s home and above her grave, whereupon they lit candles for her and they prayed for her, as was the custom and the proper way.

Hence, Prim was there, miserable and numb, holding her candle as the hot wax dribbled on her fingers, which she didn’t notice until much later. She was exhausted from her run and defeated as Faith was taken from her, but nobody had taken her, and there was nobody to blame or shout or battle for her return. She had gone just like that, from one day to the next, and the sun’s cursedly cold heat burned Prim’s

cheeks and neck, which it shouldn't have if she had worn the scarf Faith had given her, as was the proper way, but in her haste and hurry, Prim had forgotten about it.

And as rage and hurt and grief and desperation boiled her insides, Prim dropped to her knees by Faith's grave and, not knowing what else to do, the poor thing sang. And she sang and she wailed and she cried a song of loss and mourning with no words and seven voices, and the winds carried it far down the road, and they say that it was even heard all the way in YISUN's speaking house and they say that all who heard it hung their head in shared grief, both servants and gods, animals and plants alike. Thusly, Prim sang for a day and a night until all her strength left her and her voice was long gone and her tears had dried up against her will, whereupon no brilliant blossoming trees sprouted out of nowhere, and no angels or demons or gods appeared to make things right, and no miracles happened whatsoever.

Prim then fell onto the ground beside Faith and slept for three days and three nights. When she woke up, she tiredly and numbly said her goodbyes and left to return to the road, and so Prim walked the road again.

But what Prim didn't know is that her song, reaching no matter how far and wide, could never catch up with the most subtlest of waves slithering across the road and everywhere else in equal measures. And it didn't matter, for she didn't have to. It was no wave to be measured in frequencies nor amplitudes, it was not one to be measured in densities nor pressures or viscosities. It was no wave to be measured at all, in fact, for it was intangible, and it had been a long time in the making. It was a wave rippling and glistening with memories and echoes of Faith and who she was, a wife and a mother and a grandmother, a kind humble flame wanting little more than she needed; With her small and grand gestures alike, with her laugh, with her tales, with her songs; Her stern gaze, her advice, her proper way of doing things; With brief moments and memories carved warmly into the flames of those who knew her and loved her, now echoing into the world as parts of them. And the wave would flow, silently and invisibly, until it would pop up in a small blip in unexpected places, be that a thought, a memory long gone resurfacing, a deed done differently because that'd be the proper way of doing things. And sometimes, sometimes it may appear even more clearly than a mere blip, just as it did

in Prim's wordlessly sung eulogy, or perhaps in a story, one much like this one. Then, it would appear for what it was: a wave carrying itself, and a wave carried by Prim herself wherever she went, and a wave that would then disperse quietly and invisibly until its next blip.