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Freely You Shall Receive, Freely You Shall Give

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Freely You Shall Receive, Freely You Shall Give

Brie Sylviana-Clarno

"I wonder what it feels like, being pregnant," I murmur. My eyes are half closed as we lay on Great Grandma Ruby's old quilt. The sky is that dark, inky ebony...the kind of black that makes the stars shine even brighter, the tiny twinkling eyes of a belly-laughing baby. The blanket feels soft and worn under my tender fingers, a quilt that knows a thousand slumbers and countless dreams. Mom turns to her side; the grass greets her movement with a soft groan, a quiet rustle. She reaches a slender, tanned hand across the gap and places it on my abdomen.

"It feels like your heart, deep inside your belly, thumping wildly before performing in front of a thousand people. It feels like a butterfly, trapped in the small, cupped hands of a child; beating its wings so hard and fast it seems like it might break free. It feels like hope; like true, honest to goodness love, buried under layers of memories and bone," she answers in a whisper. Mom never disturbs the quiet of the night, unless it's to run naked to the edge of the hungry ocean with a bottle of huckleberry-flavored vodka and her oldest and most faithful friends. Or unless it's to clasp hands with her soul mate at the edge of the vast, limitless Grand Canyon, howling together at the full, expectant moon. I open my gemstone eyes and stare at the sky. Where is the star that fits in the space between my collarbones? Where is the one that I cradle and caress, the one created by God and woken by me? The warm tendrils of the wind kiss my legs and flutter the wisps of my hair. I place my hand on hers. We feel the breaths in my vacant stomach lift and drop our stacked fingers.

"It's only been four years, sweetheart," she murmurs; her soft, auburn curls rest lightly on her cheek; one arm is curled under her head as she sees me. She still feels my butterfly wings in her belly. "You and Noam always planned to wait five." I turn away as burning, brackish tears well in my eyes and slide down my moon face.

"Yeah. I know," I reply as my full, pink lips quiver in anticipation of further wounds. I wrap my noodle arms around my broken chest. She slides her hand under my face; my eyes are closed as the tears flow like hot blood.

"God, Carina," she chokes. "I wish I could fix it with a simple kiss. I'm supposed to know how to fill the emptiness."

I remember how it feels to lose. The crimson rivulets dripped down my wet, shining legs. My joy disappeared down the shower drain in twists and Sweet Pea scented soap. Then the impossible ache invaded.

Vacant.

Numb.

I look at her and my pain is mirrored in her ocean eyes. I am not alone; she shares my abyss, only as a mother can.