

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away. In this land, there was a kingdom. In this kingdom was a tyrant. Never once had the people of this kingdom knew the true meaning of happiness. This changed quickly when a family of three, a man, his wife and his younger sister, arrived. With a swift and decisive decision, for his family's happiness, he fought the tyrant-king. It only took him three months to uproot him from his throne. And the people rejoiced and crowned their savior king. The land prospered. The people prospered. They flourished in their new-founded happiness.

Unfortunately, the newly crowned king did not. He was not able to share the same feelings. His wife was killed, murdered by the tyrant-king's men during the war. He whittled. His blood red hair frayed, his lips cracked, his flesh pale as a ghost, his black eyes now dull as coal. Without a doubt, the Hero-King grieved painfully. His life slowly diminished.

The servants, too, felt the Hero-King's depression. His depression grew so great, his younger sister had to help out manage the kingdom. The people knew something had to be done. And then one day, the Hero-King's Adviser had a plan. A plan to rid of the Hero-King's sadness of his wife and fix his mind.

"My Liege, if you call upon the Heavenly Dragons, you can bring your wife back," his adviser suggested.

"Those are but of legends," the Hero-King replied pitifully. "And even if they did exist, they would never listen to my request."

"No, they are true indeed. And there is a way to get them to listen. You would need their relics. And speaking of relics, the temple has one of them."

And so, the two went to the temple and, with the blessings of the High Priestess, took the Tear of Time. With the relic in hand, which is nothing more than a glass-shaped teardrop filled with a glowing light gray liquid, the Hero-King entered an empty chamber. From there, alone, he recited the ancient mantra.

"Tear of Time, Branch of Life, Root of Death

I spite Hell, I anger the Heavens, I defy the Realm

With this shouting cry, I call upon you
Heavenly Ruler of Time, Tempus!"

After he finished the chant, a large beast appeared within the room, surrounded by a glorious golden light. It spreads its pitch black wings, spanning from one wall to the next. Its scales, hide, horns, claws, and fangs can only be described with one word; ancient. It was as if the beast was here from the very beginning of time.

It looked down at the Hero-King and made a low angry growl.

"What do you want, creature of flesh?" Tempus asked.

"I want my wife returned to me!" the Hero-King cried out.

"Arrogant fool, I am not Shi, controller of Death, nor am I Vie, bringer of Life. I cannot bring back your wife back from the departed. Even if I was my younger brother or sister, I still cannot bring your wife back. Resurrection is impossible." The Hero-King fell to his knee and cried. "However, I can see many futures. And within my sight, I can see a favorable future for you." The Hero-King stood up again.

"And what be this future you speak of?" asked the Hero-King.

"Your beloved wife cannot return. However, there is another who is suitable for you. She possesses nearly all the qualities your wife has, including a few extra."

"Who is this woman? I command you to tell me!" the Hero-King shouted, waving the Tear at Tempus.

"If not for that, you would be crushed under my foot. Very well, the woman who is like your wife is someone close to you. You've been with her since birth."

"Y-y-you lie! You cannot possibly mean my own younger sister?!"

"I, Tempus, do not lie. I foresee the future. I see your path. And this path is the one you should want to take. There is not alternate route. You forget this chance, you will wallow in despair as you are now."

"But she will never agree to this!"

“That is where we come into play. Gather the rest of the relics and my brethren and I shall help you. We can refine her into the woman you want her to be. We can break her mind to the point where she will only listen to you.”

The Hero-Kind stood there as Tempus laid himself onto the cold stone floor. The God muttered a few words and fell asleep. The Hero-King knew what to do. He walked outside the room and ordered his adviser to find and summon his sister to his chamber.

His sister, Aria, was alone in the garden during this time. Her hair, red like fire with a slight tint of orange. Like her brother, Aria has black eyes but not like her brother's. Her eyes are more of a gentle and bright darkness, comparable to the night sky filled with shimmering stars. She was fair skinned and unlike her brother who spent most of his time cooped up inside the castle, her time was spent outside in the fields. But despite her active and kind personality, she, true to her name, doesn't have any friends. The only person she is close to is her brother.

Once the adviser found her and relayed the message, Aria leapt up to her feet and made her way to her brother's chamber. But instead of directly going to her brother's room, she took a detour around the castle. She watched the scenery pass by her through the stained glass, eventually stopping right in front of a field with a single stone slab erected from the ground. It was a tomb stone for her brother's wife. She looked at it for a long time, made a silent prayer, and continued her path.

She passed by a room and stopped. A strange sound, like a quiet growl, came from behind the door. Curious, she opened the door and entered the room. She gasped at what she discovered inside the chamber. It was a dragon. She was about to leave but the door slammed shut on its own. She couldn't open the door. And the beast awoke from the noise. Aria fell on her bottom and faced the mighty creature.

“Are you going to eat me?” Aria asked.

“No, little one,” Tempus replied. “Who are you?”

“I am...Aria, the Hero-King's sister.”

“So, you are that man’s object of affection.” Aria was puzzled by those words. “Heed well to my words, the Heavenly Lord of Time, Tempus. Your brother plans to seek out the relics of the other Heavenly Lords and control them so they can force you to marry him.”

‘You’re a liar! My brother would never do that!’

“Oh but he plans to. I have seen his future, just as I have seen your future. But if you wish to change your dreaded destiny, listen to me.”

And so, Tempus told Aria of the two remaining relics that her brother has to collect, the Branch of Life and the Root of Death. Although the Branch of Life was nearby, Tempus ordered Aria to not retrieve it, for her future showed that she will fail in retrieving it. Instead, she needed to head straight for the Root of Death, located in the realm between Heaven and Hell. To get there, she needed to locate a place where the dead and the living meet constantly. However, Tempus cannot tell her where to locate this place, for a Heavenly Lord cannot reveal the location of another Heaven Lord’s relic.

“But how do I know where that place is?”

“You will know, child. You will know.”

And Tempus went back to sleep again. Aria left the room and saw her brother down the hall. She quickly ran, knowing her talk with Tempus had been discovered. And that became true as her brother ordered soldiers to capture her. Aria knew that she could not out run the soldiers so she quickly began to think, trying to figure out the place where the dead and the living meet constantly.

She ran by the grave stone, heading to the vine covered wall when it hit her. The place where the dead and the living meet constantly is the cemetery. Aria turned back and sprinted towards the stone. With the thought of Heaven and Hell on her mind, the moment she touched the stone, she was sucked into a vortex. The soldiers who spotted Aria being whisked away were shocked and stood there, not knowing what they would say to the Hero-King. But, after some time, they explained to him what happened.

“Find some way to get there, you fools! The rest of you, haul your bums to the Forest of Life! I must have that relic!” the Hero-King ordered.

While the soldiers left, the Hero-King looked at the grave stone, wondering how his sister managed to disappear through the grave stone.

Meanwhile, Aria opened her eyes to the strange realm, the land where Heaven and Hell borders each other. She had no idea what to do next. But, she would not allow herself to give up yet. She had to find the Root of Death, otherwise she will become her brother's puppet. She walked across the path made of bones, toward to what would be her destination.

She came to a fork in the road. Near the three paths, a strange being stood there. One half was completely white, even with white feathers. On the other half of the creature, it was completely black, including black bat wings.

"I am the guardian of the Heavenly Lord of Death, Shi. Who are you and what is your purpose?"

"I am Aria and I seek the Root of Death," she explained.

"If you want the Root of Death, I must present you the trial. Ahead of you, there are three routes. They are the trial of courage, wisdom, and trickery. You must pick one and I cannot tell you which path is which. Succeed in one of the three and you will be able to find the Root of Death and will have an audience with Shi. Fail, and you will become part of the road."

Aria faced the three paths and thought about which one she should take. After a few minutes, she decided to take the path on the left. The moment she stepped on it, the other two disappeared. Though, that did not discourage her. By the time she reached the end of the path, the guardian appeared in front of her.

"You have chosen the path of wisdom. Choose your words well when you answer this. There is a fire in your house. You are only allowed to take one person from your family. Who do you take?"

Aria was about to blurt out her answer but quickly shut it closed. Answering simply with taking her brother out of the house isn't the answer. She knew it couldn't be. There must be another way she could look at this. And it occurred to her.

“My brother and I, in the past, lived in an old house. Sometimes, he would be too ill to move on his own, especially during the cold seasons. During that time, I would take my brother by the hand and lead him to the fire in the fireplace, where we would warm up.”

“...I see. So you have decided to look at the situation that way. Very well. From my evaluation...you passed. You have displayed your wisdom. Proceed forward to Shi’s chamber.”

The guardian disappeared and Aria moved on ahead. Soon, she arrived in Shi’s chamber. Skeletons lined and decorated the black stone walls. Black iron plates covered the floor, along with the pillars. In the center of the room, a cauldron made of rib cages sits there. Within it is a green glowing liquid filled with various human bits. At the surface of the liquid, a large fang floats.

Aria takes the large fang and felt a strange surge coming from it. Suddenly, she heard someone behind her. She turned around and gasped. It was her brother.

“Give me the Root of Death, sister,” the Hero-King demanded.

“I will not!”

The Hero-King bolted towards Aria. She quickly ran to the edge of the room. Fortunately, the Hero-King was covered in his armor so he could not keep up with Aria. Unfortunately for her, she tripped on the scattered bones. But when Aria fell, the Root of Death slammed into the floor, making a slight crack.

Not worried about the crack, the Hero-King takes the Root of Death from Aria and kicks the cauldron away. Magic began to fill the air. The Hero-King pulled a out glass teardrop, the Tear of Time, and a vein, the Branch of Life, and held the three relic out. Soon, they levitated and the Hero-King spoke.

“Tear of Time, Branch of Life, Root of Death
I spite Hell, I anger the Heavens, I defy the Realm
With these anguished souls, I offer to you
With these foul hands, I reach out to you
With this shouting cry, I call upon you

Heavenly Ruler of Death, Life, and Time

Shi, Vie, Tempus!”

Suddenly, three dragons slowly materialized into the room, first being Tempus, next Vie, and last, Shi. The mighty lords bellowed, the room shook. While Tempus had a decrepit and old visage, Vie could be described as an ever blooming flower that would never wilt. Her olive green scales are smooth and polished to the point where you can see your own reflection.

But when comparing Shi to the rest of the two Heavenly Lords, he can only be called an abomination. His brown hide and scales are ruined, torn, and bloodied. Chunks of his flesh are missing, to the point where even his bones are visible. His wings look as if they can’t even take him off the ground.

The Hero-King looked at the three lords in awe. And he presented their relics.

“I have brought them all. Therefore, all of you will have to listen to me!” the Hero-King shouted. “Grovel at your master’s feet! I command you!”

Both Vie and Tempus lowered their heads down but Shi did not. The Fell Lord looked at Aria and made a quiet chuckle. Aria did not understand and neither did the Hero-King.

He asked the Fell Lord why he wasn’t bowing to him. And the Fell Lord’s response was this:

“You may have what you say is my relic but is it really? To me, all I see is a broken tooth. If there was any magical energy contained in it, it has escaped.”

Once the Hero-King realized what the Fell Lord meant, the Hero-King attempted to the run but it was too late for him. Shi whipped him up into the air and then chomped down right on him. Only trace left of the man was his blood.

Aria shrieked but Tempus ordered to calm down. Then he looked at his brethren and told them that they had to show their thanks to Aria. So, Vie lowered her head to Aria but Shi does not. Tempus questioned Shi why he wasn’t bowing his head.

Instead of answering Tempus, Shi asked what Aria wants. When she tells him, Shi will grant her that as showing his thanks. However, Aria wasn’t sure what she could ask for. She didn’t really want anything. And again, a thought occurred to her.

"You are the Heavenly Lord of Death, correct?"

"Yes, I am."

"Then...I want you to make sure that my brother and his wife are together in the afterlife."

"Very well. I will grant your favor."

The Heavenly Lord of Death dissipated. Then, the Heavenly Lord of Life faded. Only the Heavenly Lord of Time remained.

Tempus asked if Aria was satisfied with her life and the way how things turned out. She simply nodded her head. Aria was whisked away back inside the castle courtyard. With proof that her brother "passed" away, Aria was crowned queen on the kingdom and lived a long, lonely, but happy life.