

## 2.1

### Randy Ditty

Like Summer snow, Randy's walk to the tarmac was somber and meandering. Some months and a year ago, as last Spring's flowers were first coming into bloom, magic made the weather change. A powerful storm whipped across South Kreya, raining truck-sized hail, sleet and snow.

Amidst blaring sirens and gale winds, nary a scream could be heard that day. Yet, surely, there were many. Panicked people packed tightly into bunkers.

Prodigious hail crushed cars, severed powerlines, and shook earth. Naked wiring flailed with wild electricity, shocking buildings into flames. Cityscapes burned with fire and emotion.

Children wept, screaming for their mothers. Fathers wept too. The recent Bombing of Hirishoma and Nakasagi poisoned their thoughts. It had taken the Japanese two years to rebuild a single city. How long would it take them to rebuild an entire country?

When the roaring winds and magic calmed, people found themselves trapped. Snow had piled high above most doorways, and many were powerless against it.

Cellphone footage captured tragic spectacles of humanity in hysterics: men and women frantically clawing with bleeding fingers at the encroaching snow. People suffocating and voiding themselves after death. People retching from claustrophobia, anxiety or disgust. Bodies smeared like strawberry jam by fallen hail.

The news could not get enough of it.

Some people felt it through despair. Others through self-sacrifice. But all of South Kreya felt it. They were miserable for it—even Randy, but him for a different reason.

For as long as he could remember, Randy had been a soldier. Most of the time and lately, he wasn't even Randy anymore; he was Sergeant Ditty, and no other.

When the angel appeared in front of him, it stopped time for the two of them. Without divinity, such magics were unimaginable; and Randy's old misery was awash with new surprise. After all there was no precedent for it.

To cast a spell, one must draw upon their own will and memory to forcefully recreate an experience. One must recall using some combination of movement, sound, will and memory to invoke a powerful intent and command the universe to comply.

Yet, in practice and in form, magic was illusory.

Spells were only as powerful as their creator. Any as or more powerful could use their own spells to counter; and, those far more powerful could counter through mere observation. After all, those so mighty have equally mighty beliefs; and who is a bug to tell the ocean that she is ablaze?

When in conflict, the more powerful will and memory overwrites the lesser.

Such was the prevalent Theory of Anti-Magic Compositions and explained why those with powerful wills and powerful memories—epic enchantments, soldiers, craftsmen, politicians and the like—shrugged off any petty attempt at harming them.

Some time into Randy's walk, he stopped and sat down beneath a bus station shelter, then sighed. His heavy breath unfurled against the falling snow. He was not cold, but the seat was. Unsolicited, his subconscious called forth a timeless visage of yesterday's cameraman—a young college boy with short hair, brain matter and skull fragments bursting from his pleading expression.

Randy stifled a snuffle.

He hadn't wanted to kill the boy, but he had to.

He gazed outward upon the wintry expanse as a large engine hailed from afar. Sweeping the roadway, it flew by the station with windy speed, shaking the shelter like a snow globe as it passed. The flurry soon settled and Randy hunkered down, burying his face in his legs.

He missed his dog. Not in childhood or hence had there been better company than she. He had returned to the alleyway in which he'd found her on that particularly cold and rainy day. Yet, upon returning, they eight lay dying or dismembered among pools of their own blood. Transfixed by horror, Mrs. Mason screamed while Randy stared with youthful innocence at the hound who murdered them.

She screamed so loud that Mr. Doyle, the shopkeeper, came running with his cane and beat the bloody hound to death.

"Sorry kid," he had said after a long sigh to Randy.

Sat on a cold posterior, Randy's thoughts echoed, "*Sorry, kid.*"

Randy approached the salt and pepper dog and lifted it in his hands. Its head hung limply by a shred. Looking to Mrs. Mason for answers, he trembled with juvenile disillusionment. Although he knew his father would never allow a dog, he had thought one might somehow work out.

"This one's still alive," Mrs. Mason said. "Can you save her, Mr. Doyle?" Her eyes were begging him to say 'yes.'

"Let me have a look."

The salt and pepper puppy's neck flap stretched and snapped apart. Its head fell to the floor with a moist thump, and Randy looked to Mr. Doyle for answers.

He inspected the pup Mrs. Mason held up with the veteran eyes of a combat medic and sighed, "Sorry kid." He thumbed his cane, turned away and walked back to the drugstore frowning.

Suddenly, a mewling sound came from afar. Mrs. Mason counted seven corpses, not eight. One dog had hid and survived. She shook Randy from his transfixion and pointed at it. “See! Life finds a way, don’t it? We’ll bring them to my house, I’ve plenty of room—backyard!” She grabbed Randy’s shoulders and pulled him to his feet. “Go get him! I’ll get a box—wait here!” She handed Randy the umbrella and ran to the drugstore. “Mr. Doyle!” she called as she went.

Randy had not realized it then, but that was his first real magic. His mumbled sobs, shaking and disbelief, had together composed a spell. “*They can’t all be dead.*” They were not. He had resurrected a dog.

He missed that dog.

Mr. Doyle promised Mrs. Mason that he would bury the pups. Though Randy now doubted Mr. Doyle’s intentions, his promise did free Randy from having to carry a box of dead puppies, and famine was a needful thing—so needful that, maybe, he needed to lie.

This other dog didn’t have her salt and pepper fur nor the same demeanor, but she was alive.

He and Mrs. Mason walked hand in hand to her home, a sprawling farmland estate. The path leading up was hidden from both sides by tall, yellowed stalks of the past summer’s crop. Crowning a distant hillock, a pillared white manor rose above the cornstalks as they approached.

“You live here?” Randy asked with some surprise, color having returned to his face.

She chuckled. “Yes, along with my husband and our son, Samuel, who we named after our ancestor, Samuel Mason. It was my husband’s first choice, and I thought it was nice. Samuel was the of our family to move to the Amricean continent and is a famous militiaman, having served in the First Amricean Militia and fought against tyranny.

“Ah, my husband is famous too! Is your father a militiaman?” she asked with a turn of the head and a wide smile.

“I…” Randy was reluctant to speak of his father. “What about your husband?”

She faced forward, “Why yes! Yes my husband most certainly is!” She began lightly trotting. “My husband is fighting the war. The good war! Against the Nazis!” she said with a boo. “My husband.” She stopped skipping. “Is your father away, too?”

Randy remembered her expression well. A wide smile in front of a frown.

“No,” he said, Randy’s father had been returned to his home, ‘deficient,’ limping, and with a temper.

“Oh, that’s nice. Not everyone can keep a dog, though. There’s a war going on! But Letho, my Letho, he’s a hero! Checks and letters mailed prompt each week ‘cause he cares. And everyone’s contributing!” She pumped her fist and grabbed her bicep, a salute to powerful women everywhere. “They’ve even got me casing rounds and filling belts with bullets!”

The loud squeal of breaking tires jolted Randy to attention. The bus had just arrived, and people were already filing out from it. People sat at Randy's sides stood abruptly and put away their phones.

Randy took a seat near the back.

Abroad, a frequent Google search had become "how did the snow clear?" followed by "when will the snow clear" and "will the snow clear." The answer was that it had never cleared and would never clear. Despite growing international efforts to dispel the magical winter, it was being fed by the despairing masses. Although they meant no harm in their despair, their daily rituals had become something of a grand composition.

All South Kreyia contributed their will and memory to the endless snow.

Truthfully, the grand composition which caused the initial storm should have dissipated within a week of beginning. Yet here South Kreyia was beneath a dusting of Summer snow.

The anomalous weather was beginning to impact the surrounding environments, especially West Taiwan, Japan, and neighboring bodies of water. Although Russia's contribution of arctic technologies made the snow generally manageable, South Kreyia's farmlands were in shambles, and their hydroponic technologies did not yield enough crop to feed the whole country.

Amidst severe famine, South Kreyia's pleas for foreign aid went largely unanswered. The Asian continent's long history of war and the heated rebuke of Kreyia's enemies forced most to stay their helping hands for fear of stoking conflict.

Meanwhile, poor, poor children with no money and no direction were herded into churches as orphans—No-one to teach them virtues. No food to fuel their growth. Too few Sisters and their miscreant siblings all huddled by the Eternal Fire for warmth while Father spoke "His" praises and begged a miracle for dinner, that children would feel full as they sleep.