

IMMORTAL

a Nonfictional-Fiction
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Note from storyteller:

So you would have a story. ¿But what story would you have? ¿One of joy or one of woe? ¿A story of great strength or weakness? ¿One of love or one of hatred?

I shall tell you a story that was sung ages before it was written. I shall tell you a story of life.

CHAPTER 1:

The Goddess

Verse 1:

The Goddess washed away her immortality in the pool of the waterfall. She did this because she loved a Mortal. When the Gods saw her do this they told her, “Drink from the pool and your immortality will be restored.”

She refused. When the Gods questioned her decision she told them, “My love is immortal.”

Verse 2:

The Goddess went to the Mortal and they were happy. He took her back to the village of his people and they were accepted. She had healing abilities. Her touch had the power to heal.

She healed the people whenever they had need. Eventually the people grew curious about her abilities. The Goddess told them her story, but she would not tell them where to find the pool of immortality. She told the people, "It will bring you no joy."

Many of the people grew angry and they banished the Mortal and Goddess from the land.

Verse 3:

The Goddess took the Mortal back across the great desert to the forest in its center. In the center of the forest was the pool of immortality.

Later the Goddess gave birth to a son. The birth of the child left his mother wounded. She knew she did not have long to live.

The Mortal knew the only thing that could save her was water from the pool of immortality. He went with great haste to the pool with the hope of bringing water to his love.

But the Gods had summoned a great serpent to guard the pool so that no mortal could take what the Goddess had refused.

When the Mortal came to the pool he fought the great serpent with all of his strength, but he could not get to the water. The battle with the serpent left him injured.

He returned to his Goddess. She lay on a cot nursing the baby. The Mortal began to sob. When the Goddess saw his tears she asked, “My love, why do you cry?”

He said, “My love is dying.”

She held his head to her chest and he heard her heart beat. She told him, “Your love will never die.”

The Mortal opened his eyes when her heart stopped beating.

Final Verse:

The Mortal took the child into the desert because he didn't have any way to feed him. A journey to his old village across the perilous ocean of sand was the only hope for his son.

The Father and the infant traveled into the darkness of the desert with the stars to guide them and the moon to light their path. The night was cold and the Mortals' broken heart grew weaker. The only thing that kept his heart beating was the will to keep his child safe. He gathered rocks and constructed a dome shaped shelter around the infant. The rocks were still warm from the sun and would keep the baby warm through the cold desert night.

The Father lay his head next to the infant and said, “May love be with you and protect you always my child.”

The Mortal died from his injuries and a broken heart that night. The moon was full as it shone down on the infant.

CHAPTER 2:

The Son

Verse 1:

When daylight came so did the scorching heat. The baby cried and the strength of his mother and father were with him.

Eventually a community of travelers came across the body of the Mortal. A wise man named Papa found the infant in the rock shelter and took him to a woman who had recently given birth. The woman's name was Mama. Mama nursed him back to health. They knew the child was the son of a great

man because the father had died saving him. Because of this, the child was named “Son”.

They buried the body of the father and planted a small cactus over his grave.

Verse 2:

The travelers wandered far and wide selling spices and knowledge to survive. In the years spent traveling with his family Son was educated in the art of music. His sisters taught him to dance to the rhythm of his heart. His brothers taught him to be fearless. His family raised him with love.

When he was old enough to choose his own path in life Son was taken to the wise woman to seek her council. The woman gave Son a peace pipe and told him to breathe in the smoke. She told him that his dream would decide his fate.

Verse 3:

In his dream Son carried a beautiful woman into a room made of sunlight. He could not see her because the light was blinding, yet he felt he knew her. He lay her down in a bed made of starlight and as he did she whispered into his ear, “Welcome home.”

Son closed his eyes and he fell. He fell further and further into darkness until he fell into a forest. He stood up and saw the tall trees. He felt the grass under his feet. When Son turned around there was a ninja with eyes of blood

facing him. Son battled the ninja in the forest until the ninja suddenly disappeared.

Son heard the sound of flowing water. He followed the sound until he came to a river. In the river was a beautiful woman wearing a cloak made of moonlight. He could not see her because the light was blinding, yet he felt he knew her. She began to sing a beautiful song. Upon hearing this, Son dropped his sword and waded into the river to meet her. As he drew closer to the woman he heard a dark song. Son heard a splash in the river behind him and he knew it was the ninja.

Verse 4:

Son awoke and told the wise woman his dream. She interpreted his dream.

The wise woman told Son, “The room of light is a paradise. You will meet the daughter of a God and you will know her because her aura will be as bright as the sun, moon, and stars. Your love can save you, but you will be blinded by hate. In your blindness you will seek Death, but when you face Death you will fight. For her, you will fight Death and seek life. The river is life, and it is in the river where you will find her again. But even then, Death will follow you.

If you wish to defeat Death you must face Death. You must become stronger than Death. This is your fate.”

And so it was that Son decided to become a ninja warrior.

Verse 5:

Son was sent to the warrior on the mountaintop. The warrior was called Sensei. Every day Son trained. Every day he bled. Sensei told him, "If you wish to inflict pain on others, you must understand what pain feels like."

In combat Son's first opponent was many times his size. When he saw this, Son began to doubt himself. Sensei told him, "Even the mighty elephant must beware the strike of the deadly cobra."

Son trained for many years. When Son had grown from a child to a young man, Sensei gave him a bow and arrow and said, "Pull the arrow back into the bow string. Feel your strength. Feel your power. Feel how easy it would be to let the arrow fly from your hand into the heart of your enemy. Feel how difficult it is to hold the arrow back. When you can hold back your arrow for one day on this mountain, your training here will be complete."

With that, Sensei left Son on the mountain alone to complete his training. Seasons passed and Son grew weary surviving on the mountain, which was now covered in snow. There was no more fruit to be eaten from the trees or bushes. Every time a deer came in sight Son would draw back his arrow in the bow, but the creatures had keen hearing and would run away.

Son knew there was only one way for him to catch his prey. He climbed into a tree as the sun rose and waited with his arrow held back in the bow. The energy he used to hold back the arrow kept him warm as the falling snow began to cover him. Son stayed in the treetop all day using the last of his strength to hold the arrow, but there was no animal to be hunted. As the sun set an elk came to the base of the tree to eat. Son took aim and let his

arrow fly. The arrow passed through the creatures' heart and into the earth beneath it. Son ate his kill and made his way down the mountain back to his family where he would be greeted as a warrior.

Verse 6:

When Son returned to his people a messenger from another tribe asked for his help. A child from the messengers' tribe who possessed the ability to see into the future, had been kidnapped by a ninja clan. The ninja hoped to use her power for their own purposes. Sons' mission was to intercept the ninja before they reached their village, and recover the girl. No one was to be killed in the rescue and the enemy could not know who Son was, so Son was given the garments and weapons of a ninja.

Son waited in the swamplands until one night he saw a fire. He went stealthily to observe the situation. From a distant treetop he could see a small child and two ninja. He noticed that the child's hands and feet were not bound. As he looked at her she looked back at him.

Suddenly she ran in his direction and the two ninja took chase, laughing as if it were good sport. The girl came to the base of the tree that Son was hiding in. The two ninja approached slowly. As they came closer Son dropped from the tree branch, throwing two ninja spikes into the shoulders of his foes before he landed in front of the girl. The two ninja fell to the ground moments later. Son had dipped the spikes in a sleeping potion so he would not need to kill them to make an escape.

Son told the child to follow him. When she explained to him that she could not follow him because she was blind he asked her, “¿If you are blind, how could you see me in the tree when even the ninja could not?”

She told him, “I felt your presence.”

Son carried the child on his back through the swamp as they ran from her captors. She told him there was a third ninja who would be closer than the others. Upon hearing this Son ran even faster. On the second night, Son decided to rest in a tree to regain his strength.

As they rested, the child told Son of her ability to tell the future through dreams. He told her his dream and she told him, “You will be stronger than death before your time is done in this world.”

“I will save you from death as well.” Son promised.

“One day you will be stronger than Death, but you will not save me. I have seen it in a dream.” she said calmly. “I thank you for your efforts and hope that one day you will find peace.”

“¿How much do you know little one?” Son asked the girl.

“More than I speak of.” she answered.

Son realized that they had been resting for too long and needed to keep moving. As he took the little girls’ hand she whispered, “He is here.”

Before Son could respond he felt a burning pain in his shoulder, lost his grip on the tree branch and fell to the ground. He quickly got to his feet and drew his sword in time to block the sword of the ninja that now stood before him.

Seeing that Son was still able to fight, the ninja jumped back and began pacing. Son looked at his own shoulder and saw the ninjas' throwing star that had hit him.

“The star in your shoulder has been poisoned. Soon you will not be able to fight. Save yourself. Give the child to me and I will not kill you.” the ninja told Son.

Son told the ninja, “It is my destiny to be stronger than Death. Leave the child alone, and I will let you live.”

The ninja laughed, “That child has a price on her head. Only those who possess wealth and command armies can protect her. If you pay me I will gladly kill the one who paid me to capture her, but you have no wealth and no army. You are only here because you will be paid for your services, and that pay will only feed your clan. It will not be enough to protect them.”

Upon hearing this Son grew angry. He felt the poison in his veins and knew that he needed to strike soon while he still had strength. Son attacked the ninja. They fought until the ninja knocked the sword from Sons' hand.

Son fell to his knees and as the ninja pulled back his sword for a killing strike, Son pulled the throwing star from his shoulder and threw it into the ninjas' throat in one swift, painful motion. The ninja fell to the ground and died in a pool of his-own blood.

The girl climbed down from the tree. “We must move on.” she told Son.

Son could not see because when he killed the ninja, his blood had sprayed into Sons' eyes.

“We must find clean water to wash my eyes, but I don’t know where to find any.” Son told the child.

“I hear running water.” she replied.

“I hear nothing. But if you can see when others cannot, I trust you.” said Son.

And so it was that the blind prophet girl led Son to the river where he washed the blood from his eyes, and poison from his wound.

Upon returning the girl to her people Son was paid and given medical attention. When Son left the girls’ village his name was praised and the people wished him well.

Verse 7:

When Son returned to his family a message had been delivered by a hawk, which told of the death of the prophet girl and her village. The ninja Son had killed was the leader of his clan. The Ninja Clan avenged the death of their leader by assassinating the prophet girl and slaughtering her family.

Sensei was disappointed with Son because the mission was to rescue, not to kill.

His people understood, but Son could not forgive himself and he could not be comforted. Over and over he thought of what the little girl had told him. Son also pondered what the ninja had said. After much meditation Son decided that he would travel alone into the world in search of riches to build

a Kingdom and raise an army large enough to protect those he loved from the evils of this world. When Son told this to his family Mama told him, “Gold and swords will not keep us safe from the evils of the world. Only love has that power.”

Son heard but would not be dissuaded. When the wild horses that raced from land to land galloped across the plain, Son bid his family farewell and rode with the horses. As he rode away Son heard his family singing songs to bless his journey.

“Remember love.” was the last thing he heard his family sing as he rode into the unknown.

The wild horses could not be tamed but they allowed Son to ride with them until they came to the Land of Mirage.

Verse 8:

When the horses stopped to drink at a river Son began to explore the new territory. He saw a mysterious woman gathering water on the other side of the river and decided to approach her. She wore a dark cloak and a diamond necklace around her neck which shone so bright in the sun, Son could not see her face.

The woman looked at Son and told him to follow her. As he followed the woman he heard the neighs of the horses, but he did not look back.

Son walked with the woman through the jungle for many hours and they spoke of many things. Son offered to carry the water for her and was

surprised to find how heavy the water jug was. The more he heard her speak the more he loved the sound of her voice.

Eventually they came to a large tree and sat underneath it. Son looked upon the woman in the shade of the tree and could now see her clearly because the necklace no longer reflected the sunlight. As he looked into her eyes, Son felt his heart beating faster and faster until he felt a pain as if his heart would burst. He became light headed and his legs began to feel weak. In that moment Son knew that he loved her and would do anything in his power to have her love.

They looked into each other's eyes until suddenly without hesitation, Son kissed Lyla.

"I did not give you permission to kiss me." Lyla told him.

"I apologize, yet I regret nothing." Son said, still looking into her eyes.

"What is your name?" she asked after laughing at his apology.

"I am called Son." he told her. "Tell me your name or I shall call you Love, or Beautiful, or any other name I think befits you.

"My name is Lyla." She said. Then she kissed him.

Son asked Lyla to be his queen and return with him to his family. She agreed, but was not free to leave the land because she was a slave to the lord of the land who was a tyrant.

Lyla had been bought into slavery at a very young age but her spirit was as free as the wild horses. Son promised her that he would speak with the lord of the Land of Mirage to negotiate her freedom.

Verse 9:

Lyla took Son to the fortress of the lord of the land. The gates swung open and he was greeted with smiles.

“¡Welcome!” said the lord of the land who sat in his throne. “¿What do you seek in my kingdom?”

“I seek fortune for myself and my family.” Son answered.

“I seek knowledge of the lands beyond my own, for I have never left these lands. If you can draw me a map of all the lands you have seen beyond Mirage, I will give you the fortune you seek.” the lord bargained.

Son agreed to this and because he had traveled so many places he was able to give the lord of Mirage more than enough information.

After a short time Son had completed the map and the lord of the land was pleased. Son told the lord of Mirage that he wished to return to his family as soon as possible. He also told the lord that he wanted to take Lyla with him.

Though the lord of Mirage had many slaves he said he could not afford to let Lyla go. Son told the lord, “You can keep half of the fortune you owe me in exchange for Lyla.”

When the lord of Mirage heard this, he knew Sons’ mind could not be changed so he agreed.

“My women will prepare your horses with food and treasure so that you and Lyla may depart in the morning.” said the lord of Mirage as he embraced Son like one brother embraces another.

Son spent the night drinking with the lord of the land in celebration until he drank so much firewater, he fell asleep before he could tell Lyla that she was free to leave with him.

Verse 10:

When Son awoke, he found that his hands and feet were bound with golden shackles and silver chains. The lords’ guards took Son to the dungeon. Son was sick because he had drank too much firewater the night before so he was not able to fight the guards off as they took him down the spiraling steps deeper and deeper into the dungeon of the fortress. As they went further down into the dungeon Son realized that the dungeon was larger than the royal quarters above it. When they reached the bottom of the stairway a large door was opened and Son was thrown inside a dark room. He landed on sharp stones. As the guards entered behind him with their torches Son could see that the room was filled with diamonds, gold, and silver. Son had been brought to the lords’ treasure chamber.

The lord of the land entered the room with a smile on his face.

“This treasure is all yours but I can not let you steal one of my women.” said the lord of Mirage. “Now that you have your fortune I hope you will die in peace.”

And with that the lord of Mirage left Son locked in the treasure chamber.

Son sat with his back against the wall of the treasure chamber. The floor was covered with diamonds so when Son slept the stones cut into his skin. He could hear the other prisoners being tortured and the guard on the other side of the door who taunted him with words to break his spirit.

“¡You are a fool Son!” the guard laughed. “My lord will use the map you gave him to conquer all of the lands you have shown him. All who live in those lands will become his slaves.”

Son thought about his family and what would happen to them when the lord of Mirage followed his map. He thought of Lyla and the promise the lord of Mirage had made. Son had never been lied to by someone who embraced him as a brother before. As he thought about all of these things he began to cry. Then he began to scream as a rage took over him.

The dungeon guards had been ordered not to feed Son so that he would starve. Son survived by eating rats that came into the treasure chamber, and drinking water that dripped from the chamber ceiling when it rained.

Days passed and with each passing day Sons’ heart grew colder. He now thought of nothing but revenge. Eventually Son forgot how long he had been living in his treasure hell. He forgot about his family. He forgot about love. All of his thoughts were of darkness and hate.

Verse 11:

One night as Son sat in his prison he heard the door unlock. His hands and feet were still chained so he remained seated with his back to the wall and

waited for his captors. When the door opened the room was filled with light. Sons' eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness and it hurt to look at the light. As he shielded his eyes with his hand he heard a voice say, "I have come to free you my love."

Son knew the beautiful voice belonged to Lyla.

"The king of the kingdom of War has come here to join forces with his brother, the lord of Mirage so they may wage war on all the lands they do not control. They have been celebrating all night and have just now retired to their chambers. I gave the dungeon guard a drink that contained a sleeping potion and took his keys when he fell asleep. I would have come for you sooner, but the lord of Mirage has been watching me vigilantly until this night.

There is a tunnel in this dungeon that leads to the river. I will go to the stables and take a horse to the river where we first met. I will tell the stable guards I am going to fetch water for their lord and they will let me pass. By the time the guard of the dungeon wakes we will be gone from this cursed land." Lyla told Son as she unlocked his shackles.

Son knew her plan would work, but his heart was still cold and he still longed for revenge.

"Go now, and I will follow the dungeon tunnel to the river where we shall make our escape." Son told Lyla.

But he would not look into her eyes as he spoke. Lyla could sense his anger but she knew she did not have time to comfort him further, for the

guard would wake soon. She went back to the royal chambers and made her way to the stables.

Son walked out of the treasure chamber. He looked down the long dark tunnel and knew that he could follow it to the river and leave with Lyla, but his desire for revenge was too great. He looked at the dungeon guard who lay asleep on the floor.

Son knelt down and took the guards' sword. He then whispered into the guards' ear, "You will not die peacefully in your sleep. I shall kill you when you wake."

Son then walked up the spiral staircase that led to the royal chambers. He came to a door at the top of the stairs that led to the middle of a great hallway. At one end of the hallway was the lords' bedroom. At the other end of the hallway were the guest quarters. A guard was patrolling the hallway and Son could hear his footsteps. He waited at the door as the footsteps of the guard grew louder and louder. As the guard passed by the door, Son rushed behind him, stabbed him in the back through his chest, pulled him back behind the door and threw him down the dungeon steps in one stealthy motion.

Son then walked down the hall toward the lords' bedroom. As he drew nearer he could hear the laughter of the one who had betrayed him. Son kicked the door open to find the lord of Mirage in his bed wearing a diamond necklace and surrounded by naked women who were chained to each other.

“¿What do you seek?” asked the lord of Mirage.

“Retribution.” Son answered.

The lord of Mirage grabbed his sword and Son attacked. Son cut the hand that gripped the sword from the lords’ arm. The lord of Mirage screamed out in pain until Son choked him with the diamond necklace. As he died, the lord of Mirage could feel the diamonds cutting into his throat. Son stood behind the lord and did not loosen his grip on the lords’ necklace until he was sure the lord of Mirage was dead.

The chained women sat on the bed and said nothing. At the other end of the hallway the king of the kingdom of War had heard his brothers’ screams of agony. He had many ninja bodyguards and sent them to his brothers’ bedroom to help.

Son heard the ninja approaching swiftly down the hallway as he stood over the dead lords’ body. One of the women on the bed pointed to a bow next to a quiver full of arrows hanging on the wall under the heads of many beasts the late lord had hunted. Son took the bow and strapped the quiver around his back. He then stepped into the hallway to face the ninja bodyguards.

Son pulled an arrow from the quiver, placed it in the bowstring and pulled it back. As he pulled the arrow back he felt his rage. He then shot the arrow through the heart of a ninja. He pulled another arrow from the quiver and shot it through the heart of another foe. With every arrow Son shot another life was taken. He continued to shoot while walking toward the door

that led to the dungeon. When he reached the door Son continued to shoot until his quiver was empty. He then opened the door and went back into the dungeon.

Son waited in the darkness, crouched down on the dungeon stairs. When the first guard came past the door without a torch and started down the stairs it was so dark he did not see Son crouched at his feet.

Son pulled the guards feet up from under him, unsheathed the guards' sword, and stabbed him through his chest before the guards' body hit the stairs. Son then took a sack of firewater the guard had carried. The other guards hesitated at the door but the king of the kingdom of War commanded them to move forward. Many guards rushed down the dungeon stairs to kill Son. Son fought them all while walking backwards down the spiraling staircase, which was now red with the blood that streamed down it.

The more guards and ninja Son killed, the more advanced down the stairs. Many carried torches that shone with a brightness that still hurt Sons' eyes. He cut off one of the guards' hands and picked up the torch that was dropped. Son then filled his mouth with the firewater and spat it through the fire of the torch and onto his enemies. The firewater ignited when it hit the flames of the torch and the guards screamed in pain as Son spat fire upon them. The guards began to scatter. Some fell down the stairs and some turned to retreat only to be stabbed through their backs by Son, who killed all foes that entered his dungeon that night.

At the bottom of the stairs the guard who had been sleeping woke to see the bloody corpse of another guard at his feet. He looked up and saw Son running down the spiral stairs. The guard began to cry out for help.

“¡A prisoner has escaped!” he cried.

“¡Your lord is dead! ¡I have killed him!” Son shouted back to the guard.

The guard ran down the dark tunnel and Son gave chase. The guard could not see in the darkness of the tunnel, but Sons’ eyes were well adjusted to it. When he drew close enough, Son pounced onto the guards’ back and pulled him to the ground. Son then crawled onto the guards’ chest and held his arms down with the weight of his knees. As the guard lay there helpless he begged Son for mercy. Son began to strangle the guard. As he did this, Son thought of how the guard had mocked him in captivity. Son lost himself to rage and did not let go of the guards’ throat until his own hands were soaked in the guards’ blood.

He stood over the corpse of the guard and stared at it. Son looked down at himself and he did not know if the blood that soaked his garments was his, or the blood of his enemies. He then continued to run down the tunnel that led to the river where Lyla waited.

Verse 12:

When Son reached the end of the tunnel he saw Lyla mounted on a horse, waiting in the rain under a tree next to the river. Son ran under the tree, grabbed the horses’ reigns and began to lead it across the river. The horse smelled the blood on Son and became uneasy.

“We must hurry.” Son said to Lyla.

“You are late.” she said disappointedly. “I have longed for you to take me with you from this land as you said you would, but before I go with you I must know... ¿Are you still the man I fell in love with, or did he die in the dungeon?”

Upon hearing this Son turned around and looked into Lylas’ eyes. He looked upon her as she glowed in the moonlight.

Suddenly something struck Son in his chest and he fell into the river, still holding onto the reigns of the horse.

“¡They are here!” Lyla screamed as Son pulled himself back to his feet.

Son looked at his chest and saw the arrow that had struck him. He looked up and saw a ninja on the riverbank.

“¡Son!” Lyla screamed as another arrow hit Sons’ chest and knocked him off his feet.

Son fell into the river and the reigns slipped from his hands. He tried to fight the current as it carried him away but the river only grew stronger as it continued to rain. As the river carried him away, Son could hear Lyla screaming his name in the distance. Son struggled to stay above water for as long as he could. After he had used most of his strength and lost much of his blood, Son closed his eyes and fell asleep as the river carried him through the storming forest.

Verse 13:

Son opened his eyes to see a beautiful woman. He heard her quietly singing a lullaby. She was weaving a basket.

“¿Where am I?” Son asked her.

“This land has no name. My name is Song.” She replied. “My husband pulled you from the river and brought you here, where I tended to your wounds. You have slept for many days. At first we thought you would die but your wounds heal faster than any I have seen.”

“It is my destiny to be stronger than death.” Son explained.

“Only the Gods are stronger than death.” Song replied.

“Then I shall become a God.” said Son.

“When you are a God, remember the mortals who helped you.” Song said with a smile.

“¿What is your name?” she asked.

“I am called Son.” he answered.

“Rest now Son. You are not fully healed yet.” she said.

Son fell back asleep.

Son awoke to see a man with a long white beard looking down on him.

“I am Elden, Songs’ husband. ¿Where do you come from Son?”

“Darkness.” Son answered. “All is darkness.”

“Rest now.” Elden whispered. “All shall come to light.”

Son was still injured, so he slept.

Verse 14:

Son dreamt about his childhood. He dreamt about his family. In his dream they were singing together. He did not know the song, but he sang anyway. Then Son realized that his dream was actually a memory from his waking life.

Verse 15:

When Son awoke his wounds had healed. He was stronger than he had been before he was wounded.

He sat up and began to undo his bandages. Elden and Song entered the room.

“¿What do you plan to do with the rest of your life now that your wounds have healed?” asked Elden.

“I shall go to the kingdom of War to kill the brother of my dead enemy.” Son replied.

“You do not think clearly.” Song cautioned. “Pray to the Gods for guidance. Mine is the God of love. ¿Do you have a God?” she asked Son.

“When I was a prisoner in darkness, I prayed to the God of darkness for vengeance. When I was freed from my chains I was granted my vengeance.” Son said.

“¿But who set you free?” Song asked.

“My love.” Son said as if it hurt to remember.

“¿And where is your love?” asked Song.

“I lost her as we were escaping.” Son said as he hung his head.

“So your God of darkness granted your wish for vengeance in exchange for your love. The God of love gives love but you must sacrifice your hate. Your physical wounds have healed but your spirit is still wounded. I can teach you how to heal your wounded spirit.” Song offered.

“Tell us your story and we may be able to help you.” said Elden. Son told his life story to Elden and Song from his childhood to the ambush in the river.

“Song and I once served the old king of War.” Elden confessed. “We were skilled fighters and gifted healers as well. We thought that if we destroyed our enemies the rest of us could live in peace. But soon it became clear that the king of War planned to kill everyone who was not born in the kingdom of War.

After many innocents had been slaughtered, we decided that we had to stop his reign. I was his personal bodyguard and Song was his healer. One night, Song seduced and killed the king of War and we killed his other two bodyguards when they tried to take her prisoner. We fled far from that land, feeling that we had accomplished a great thing until we came to this temple and were allowed to stay with the monks who taught us about the God of love. After we had lived here for many years the monks told us they felt the pain of the world in their hearts and they intended to travel separate ways to spread peace and love. When they left on their pilgrimage Song and I were the only ones left, so we decided to live here in peace.

Now you have come with news that the new king of the kingdom of War plans to conquer all that he does not control. This is further proof that our actions in the past were useless.

If you let me train you as I was trained you will be able to do more with your life than just kill. You will be able to live.” said Elden.

“Lyla is gone. I no longer have the will to live.” Son sulked.

“Then realize your dream of building a Kingdom to protect all those you love in her honor.” Elden suggested.

“I am a well trained ninja warrior. What do you think you can teach me?” Son scoffed.

“I will make you a deal.” Elden proposed. “We will have a sparring match. If you can knock me to the ground you may go and I will give you gold and a horse for your travels. If you cannot knock me down you will become our pupil until you have heard all that we have to teach. ¿Do you accept?” he asked Son.

“Very well.” Son said as he rose from the floor.

“Come with me.” Elden said.

Elden and Son left Song in the candle lit temple while they went outside to spar.

Verse 16:

Son looked at his surroundings. The temple was in a desert, and in the distance was a giant oasis through which a river flowed. Son turned to face Elden and stood in his warrior stance.

“This will hurt.” Son warned.

“I’m glad you have prepared yourself.” Elden replied.

Son began with a roundhouse kick aimed at Eldens’ head. Elden dodged and began to run backwards through the sand while Son pursued. Son continued kicking and punching but Elden dodged too quickly. It wasn’t long before they reached the oasis. Son continued to attack while Elden continued to evade. Son began to question his own strength as a warrior. This made him angry.

“¡Stop running and fight me!” Son yelled, while chasing Elden through the oasis.

“I have taken a vow never to fight again. It is you who wishes to fight.” Elden said as he turned around. Son attacked Elden with a punch aimed at his chest. Elden dodged and Sons’ punch landed on the tree behind him. Son kicked and when Elden dodged, Sons’ foot hit another tree. This continued until Son had damaged his hands and feet so badly he could not run. He could only stand in pain as Elden approached and said, “Mine is the way of peace. ¿Are you ready to continue your warrior training?”

“I am.” Son answered.

“Then I will help you.” Elded said as he put one of Sons’ arms around his shoulder. Elden looked at Sons’ bloody hands and feet and asked him, “¿Why do you do this to yourself?”

Son chuckled. As they walked through the great oasis back toward the temple, Elden stopped and pointed to a river. It was the river Elden had pulled Son from. Elden warned Son of quicksand in the areas closer to the river because Son was to carry water from the river back to the temple as part of his training.

“If you fall into the quicksand it will pull you down. If you panic and fight the earth it will swallow you quickly, but if you are calm and wait patiently the Gods may smile upon you. Patience is your only weapon in the quicksand.” Elden warned.

When they returned to the temple, Song bandaged Sons’ new wounds, chuckling to herself as she did. “I too am your sensei now.” She said with a smile. “I sense fear in you but I will show you how to heal your wounded spirit.” she promised.

Song closed her eyes and began to hum a note. She instructed Son to do the same and he did. When Son hummed, Song changed her note to a note that harmonized with Sons’. When Son heard the quiet harmony of their voices, a smile came to his face.

“Listen, and feel the joy of harmony.” Song whispered.

When night came Song, Elden, and Son went outside and watched the stars. The moon shone bright. In the distance they heard desert wolves

howling at the moon. Song continued to weave her basket. Son asked her what she was making the basket for.

“When it is complete, this basket will be fit to carry my child after I give birth.” Song told him.

“Come with me.” Elden said to Son.

Son and Elden walked back into the temple. Elden carried a torch. They walked through the great temple to a room Son had never seen before. This room had no ceiling and the moonlight shone in. There was a table made of metal and a hammer on it. There was a stove full of hot coals and a bucket of water.

“The monks used this room to make glass, but you will be making a sword. I sense that you have much anger inside you and making this sword will help you to release that anger. While you craft this blade you will allow it to absorb your anger. When you strike the hot steel with the hammer, you must put your hatred into every strike. When the blade is complete it will hold all of your hate. You will then take the sword to the top of the mountain behind this temple and there you will bury the blade and vow never to kill again as a sacrifice to the God of love.” said Elden.

Over the months Son was trained in the art of peace and harmony. He was taught how to control his anger. Every day he continued to forge the sword that was to absorb his hate.

“Do you still wish to kill the king of War?” Elden asked Son one day.

“That would not bring Lyla back to me.” Son responded.

“Do you still wish to raise an army to protect those you love?” Elden questioned.

“If I had an army at my disposal I would use it for good, but as it is I will probably live out the rest of my days as a monk.” Son said.

“People look to leaders for inspiration.” Elden continued. “The people of the kingdom of War are not inspired by their leader. If you could gain the respect of the people and their army you would be able to challenge the king of War for the throne. If the people love you, you could end the reign of terror that continues to spread even as we speak. I know you have been lied to before but even when men lie, their eyes tell the truth. If you are to lead you must believe in your people. For if you do not believe in them, they will not believe in you. I tell you this because I believe there is a reason I was there to pull you from the river. Whatever you choose to do with your life I am sure this world will be the better for it.”

Elden left Son to continue forging the sword. Son hammered on the sword as sparks flew day and night until one night he finished.

That night Son told Elden and Song that he was ready to bury the sword on the mountaintop.

“When you return from the mountain your training with us shall be complete.” Elden said as he placed his hand on Song’s stomach, which was much larger than it had been when Son first saw her.

“Sing to the moon and let the stars guide you.” Song called out as Son began walking up the towering mountain of Sand.

Son had not made a sheath for his sword because the earth was to be its' sheath. He was careful not to cut himself as he climbed. It took until sunrise for Son to reach the top of the mountain.

Verse 17:

Elden and Song woke to see the sunrise. When the sun rose Song felt her baby moving in her womb. She knew it was time to give birth. Elden helped her lay on a cot near the door so she could still watch the sunrise.

Song began to breathe heavily. Elden went to the room where the sword was made so that he could heat water to help with the birth. He put a bucket of water on the hot coals and waited.

Suddenly Elden felt a sharp pain in his leg and fell to the ground. As he tried to get up, a man behind him kicked him back to the ground. Elden shouted out in pain. He turned his head to see a soldier he recognized from the past.

The king of the kingdom of War had sent many of his soldiers to search the bank of the river for Sons' body because he wanted proof that Son was dead. The desert wolves had eaten all of the soldiers who were sent except the one who stood over Elden with a bloody sword in his hand.

“¿Do you remember me Elden?” the soldier asked.

Elden said nothing.

Song could be heard from the other end of the temple, calling out for Elden.

“I shall kill your love after I am done with you.” The soldier said with a smile on his face.

“You cannot kill my love.” Elden responded.

Angered by this the soldier picked up the hammer beside the coals and with it, crushed Eldens’ kneecap.

Elden yelled out in pain and as he yelled he could hear song screaming through the pain of childbirth.

The soldier took handfuls of water from the bucket and washed his face. He then poured the remaining water onto the coals.

“I will extinguish the light in your eyes as I have extinguished those flames.” said the soldier as he pointed to the fire pit which was now covered in a mist of steam. A great cloud of steam rose into the sky.

Meanwhile, Son had just dug a hole in which he planned to burry his sword. When he saw the large steam cloud rising from the temple he knew there was a problem because Elden would never waste water, and he had never let the fire in the fire pit die.

Son picked up his sword and ran back to the temple with great haste. His descent down the mountain was two hundred times faster than his ascent, as he glided over the sand.

As Son approached the temple he could hear song cry out in pain. He crept into the room and saw Song in labor, sitting up against the wall on a cot with the basket she made for the baby.

“Son, help me.” said Song through gasps of pain.

“I will find Elden.” Son assured her.

“No.” she said as tears filled her eyes. “He will not return. Evil has come here.” she explained.

“I have not been trained for this.” Son told her. “You will have to guide me through it.”

“Just hold my hand.” Song told him.

Son held Song’s hand until the time came for him to hold the infant.

“She is beautiful.” Son said as he handed the infant back to her mother.

Song lay on the cot with her baby in her arms and smiled. Son was worried because Song continued to bleed after giving birth.

“¡We must stop the bleeding! ¡Tell me how to heal you!” he said in a panic.

“Sing to me and my baby.” she responded calmly.

So Son sang to her and her daughter until Song said, “Son, hold my daughter, for she will be yours to name and protect after I am gone.”

Son held the baby girl. As he held her he remembered the blind prophet girl he had failed to protect in the past.

Meanwhile, the soldier was enjoying torturing Elden. Elden was still alive but he could no longer move. His ligaments had been cut, and many bones had been crushed. Even his eyes had been cut out by the soldier.

“You should have kept running Elden.” the soldier laughed. “The new king of War is more thirsty for blood than the king you and Song killed. He

wishes to rule this world. ¿Why did you not run further Elden?” the soldier asked mockingly.

“I stopped running because I am no longer afraid.” Elden answered before coughing up his own blood.

“I did not come to this land to find you.” The soldier explained. “I seek a warrior. He killed the lord of Mirage and now his brother the king seeks revenge. Tell me where he is and I will kill your love quickly, instead of slowly.”

“I told you.” Elden said. “You do not have the power to kill my love.”

After Elden said this, the soldier drove his dagger through Eldens’ heart and left him for dead.

The soldier then walked to the other side of the temple where he had heard Song crying. When the soldier walked into the room he saw Son with the baby cradled in his arms. Tears were in Sons’ eyes as he stood over Songs’ lifeless body.

Son immediately saw the soldier and knelt down quickly to pick up his sword from the floor. As he held the infant with one hand and reached for his sword with the other, the infant began to slip from his hand. The soldier charged Son, and swung his sword at Sons’ head. Son abandoned his sword, secured the infant with his other hand, and dodged the soldiers’ blade all in one swift motion. Then he ran into the desert toward the oasis.

The soldier gave chase, swinging his sword as Son dodged while running backwards. Son kicked dirt into the soldiers’ eyes and turned to run even

faster as he approached the oasis. The dirt in the soldiers' eyes slowed him down but he followed Sons' tracks.

Son approached a tree with many branches and leaves. He pulled himself and the infant up the tree with one arm and hid there. The baby stopped crying after they were in the tree. Son stayed perched on a branch hidden by the leaves. He knew that he could not feed the baby even if he could escape the soldier.

Suddenly the baby started to cry again. At that same moment Son heard the leaves of the tree rustling and he dropped from the branch just in time to elude a dagger the soldier had thrown into the branches. As Son dove from the branch toward the ground, he flipped himself over in mid-air to land on his feet with the baby still cradled in his arms. Before him stood the soldier, who had more throwing knives in his hands. Son continued to run.

When he felt a dagger in his back he knew he could not outrun the soldier, so he ran toward the quicksand that Elden had warned him about. The soldier continued to throw daggers at Sons' back. As Son approached the edge of the quicksand, he felt another dagger hit his back.

Son jumped as far as he could over the quicksand and landed in it, but close to solid ground. The soldier did not notice the change in the ground beneath him until he had fallen into the quicksand. As the soldier fell his dagger flew from his hand, over Sons' head, into the sand in front of Son.

Son was now waist deep in quicksand and sinking. He held the infant as high as he could over his head and said, “May the God of love bless and protect this child.”

The soldier fought against the quicksand as it pulled him down even faster.

“My comrades will avenge me!” the soldier cried out just before his mouth submerged into the quicksand.

“You have killed yourself.” Son replied as the soldier choked on the earth.

After the soldier sank to his death, all was quiet. Son waited with the baby held above his head and quicksand that was now up to his nose. He started to wonder about his destiny.

Moments later, a large snake slithered past the quicksand where Son was submerged up to his eyes. Son held the infant with one hand over his head, and reached for the snake with the other. The snake was just out of reach, so Son picked up the dagger that the soldier had dropped and stabbed the snake's body. The snake quickly tightened its coils around Son's arm and began to wrap Son into its body. When the snake had wrapped Son partially into its coils, Son could place the infant which he held in his other hand on solid ground. Son then struggled with the large snake, which tried to squeeze him to death. Son could fight off the power of the snake's coils, but he could not free himself completely. He knew the baby would die if he did not attend

to her soon. Son eventually escaped the grip of the snake by tearing through its' body with his teeth.

Son then picked up the infant and took her back to the temple. He knew that he couldn't feed her and he knew she would not survive the journey to the nearest village. He took the infant and placed her in the basket Song had made. Son then took the infant to the river. Son sang to the infant while he held the basket in the river. As he sang, he was thinking of a good name for the girl. When he had thought of a name he stopped singing and said to the infant, "Your name shall be Love. May you share my fortune, my child."

With that, Son let go of the basket and the river carried the child away.

Son returned to the temple and buried Elden and Song together under the mountain. He bandaged his wounds, picked up his sword, and took everything he needed for his journey. Then he took the horse and began the long ride to the kingdom of War.

Verse 18:

Son rode the horse through the oasis and into the jungle, following the river that had once brought him to safety. After many days and nights of traveling, Son ran out of food. There seemed to be nothing to hunt in the jungle and he let his horse eat any vegetation because his horse needed strength to carry him. Son continued to ride through the jungle without food.

One night as he rode his fatigue was so great that he fell off of the horse. The horse returned to him, nudging his head with its nose as if to encourage him.

As Son lay on the ground he realized that he would probably not last another day without food. Even if there was game to be hunted, Son did not have the strength to chase it. He had grown too fond of his horse to eat it, so he stroked its mane when it knelt down beside him.

Later that night when the moon shone down on Son, he heard the wolves howling. The horse became uneasy and rose up. Son still had some strength, so he built a fire. As he watched the flames he felt as if he was being watched. He looked into the darkness and he could see the flames reflected in the eyes of wolves. There were many of them. The leader of the wolf pack approached into the light of the fire, baring its teeth at Son. The wolf pack smelled the horses' fear and waited for their leader to draw first blood.

Son picked up the sword that he had crafted in the temple. As he stood, he leaned against the horse for support because his strength was almost gone. The wolves did not fear fire. As the leader of the pack advanced toward Son, Son could see its full shape. The grey wolf was half the size of Sons' horse. Son knew he would only have one strike in which to kill the wolf because he did not have the strength to fight through the night. The other wolves also began closing in on Son and his horse, anticipating the kill.

The grey wolf pounced suddenly with the intention of biting Sons' throat. Son dropped to his knees and raised the sword above his head. The wolf fell on the blade which pierced its heart. The wolf howled out in pain, raising its head to the moon before it died.

When the other wolves saw this and smelled the blood of their leader, they became afraid and ran away, howling to the moon.

Son covered himself in the blood of the wolf, so that all the predators of the jungle would smell the blood and know that he was not easy prey. He ate meat and used the fur from the wolf to stay warm through that cold night.

When daylight came Son rose with new strength, mounted his horse and continued to ride through the jungle.

He rode past the Land of Mirage undetected, and eventually reached the kingdom of War.

Verse 20:

Son rode through acres of farmland before arriving at an enormous wall. He rode alongside the wall until he came to a gate. When Son pounded on the gate a voice asked him, "Do you have gold?"

Son had a pouch of gold coins that Elden had put in his room the night Son had gone to bury the sword. Son was charged a tax at the gate and was then allowed to enter the kingdom of War.

As Son walked his horse down the road, he looked at all of the people. They were people from different lands that had been conquered by the king. There were fire breathers, farmers, dancers, and many other people displaying their talents in the street market. There were buildings larger than any Son had ever seen. Son found a place where he and his horse could get water and food. He paid a boy to watch his horse and left to get a drink. Son walked into the building and asked the owner for firewater. He leaned his sword by his chair and drank the firewater slowly. Across the room sat a woman and a man. The woman was curious so she began to study Son with her eyes. When the man saw her looking at Son, he pulled her hair with one hand, and struck her face with the other. The woman yelled out in pain and lowered her head, afraid to look up. When Son saw this, he stood up and approached the man. The man had a sword by his side. When Son approached, the man put his hand on the sword.

“¿Why did you strike her?” asked Son.

“¿She belongs to me and I will do as I please!” the man yelled as he began to draw his sword.

Before the man could draw his sword, Son tackled him. They both fell to the floor and Son quickly pinned the man down, grabbing his hair while holding his head to the floor.

“Because you do not protect those who are weaker than you, I will.” said Son.

After saying this Son broke both of the man's arms. The man screamed out in pain and ran away as soon as Son let him go.

"Who are you?" asked the woman.

"I am a stranger on a journey." Son answered as he sat down next to her.

"May I join you on your journey?" asked the beautiful woman as she looked into his eyes.

"I must travel alone." said Son.

"You are in love." The woman said. "I can see it in your eyes. Where is she?"

"She was likely killed by your king for helping me escape, but if she still lives I shall find her." Son replied.

"No one loves me and I have no place to go now." the woman said as tears began to fall from her eyes. "What will I do now?" she sobbed.

"Begin anew." Son said as he placed his bag of gold coins before her. "I have a good horse too. You may take it." He continued.

The woman was grateful, and told Son that she would help him in any way she could. He told her that he needed to speak with the king. She explained that the only way to speak to the king was to win a fighting competition that was held once every ten years to find the best fighter in the land. The victor of this competition was to be granted one wish and serve at the king's right hand.

"It is a fight to the death and only one is allowed to survive." The woman told him.

“The competition takes place tomorrow afternoon.” She continued. “The people call it ‘Day of the slaughter’.”

“Thank you for your help.” said Son as he stood up to leave.

“¿Where are you going?” the woman asked him.

“To win the competition.” he said.

The next day the woman showed Son where the great fight was to take place. As they approached the gigantic stadium they could hear the roaring crowd inside. They walked through the gate.

“This is where you continue your journey alone.” She said as she jumped onto the horse Son had given her.

“When I win this competition, things will change for the better in this kingdom.” Son told her.

“Even if you kill the warriors and become the kings’ right hand, you will still be his slave. The king of War does not care for his people and his people do not care for him.” she said.

“I have taken a vow not to kill.” Son said as he looked down at his sword.

“Then may the Gods shield you!” she yelled as she rode away on the steed.

Verse 21:

Son continued to make his way to the stadium floor. Many people went into the stands above the stadium floor to watch the fight. Others waited on the field looking at each other with hate in their eyes. On the field were

ninja, soldiers, and mercenary fighters who all wished to be declared the best warrior in the land. Each fighter had their own unique fighting style. There were weapons of all kinds paired with their masters. When the warriors looked at Son they saw that his sword had no sheath. They mocked him because of this. Eventually the stadium was full and the king of War sat in his throne which overlooked the field.

“¡Let the fight begin!” the announcer yelled out as his voice echoed through the stadium.

The crowd roared. The stadium field turned into a battlefield. The warriors killed each other in hopes of achieving their goals. Son tried to negotiate with his opponents.

“¡My quarrel is not with you! I must speak with the king!” he told them while deflecting sword strikes with his sword.

Son would not kill them, but he did knock them down with kicks to discourage them when they attacked.

The king of War looked down on Son and was angered by the fact that Son was not killing his opponents. The king raised his hand and the crowd became silent.

The announcer stopped the fight and told Son to come forward. Son stepped in front of the other warriors. The announcer then proclaimed, “Because he does not kill when the king commands, the long lock warrior must be killed. One wish will be granted to the warrior that kills him.”

Upon hearing this all of the warriors looked at Son. They quickly surrounded him and attacked. The many ninja threw throwing stars and spikes. The soldiers shot arrows from their bows and threw knives at Son as he dodged them with great speed. Many of the warriors were injured on opposite sides of the circle when the weapons Son dodged found unintended victims.

Son continued to elude attacks, countering them and using the weapons of his opponents to defend himself. He dual wielded many weapons, but he always kept his sword close. Still, he tried to negotiate with his foes.

Son had already survived longer than the king had expected. The king ordered the top ranking officers in his army to join the fight to kill Son. The officers came with swords and attacked. Son was running, dodging, and countering attacks from all directions. He felt his energy slipping away as time passed. The sun was close to setting. Son was aggravated because the soldiers would not listen to him when he tried to negotiate.

Suddenly Son felt the blade of a sword cutting into his neck. He moved with the blade while blocking another blade that was directed at his heart. Son moved aggressively yet gracefully while maneuvering around his attackers. It was like dancing with Death. He did not know whether or not the wound was fatal until he took a deep breath. When he felt air filling his lungs he knew the wound was not fatal.

Son was tired and he became angry. He stopped trying to negotiate with the soldiers. Now every time he countered an attack, Son would cut the neck of his opponent the same way his neck had been cut.

The soldiers dropped their weapons and held their hands over their neck wounds as they took the breath that would tell if their wound was fatal. As the soldiers began to look around they realized that they had all been given the same wounds on their necks.

“¡Yield!” Son shouted as he cut the neck of yet another soldier who dropped to his knees and checked his wound.

The soldiers began to realize that Son was sparing their lives. This confused them and they became conflicted about what they should do. The crowd also realized what Son was doing and they began to cheer him on.

“¡Merciful!” they shouted over and over as if that was Sons’ name.

In order to win the favor of his people, the king stopped the fight and declared Son the victor. Son was wounded and tired, but he did not let weakness show as he walked up the stairs from the stadium field to stand before the king of War.

The soldiers and generals who had just been attacking him now walked behind him with matching neck wounds.

The king was afraid of Son even though he did not know Son was the warrior who had killed his brother. He had never seen such a display of skill on the battlefield. As Son came closer to the throne the king whispered into

the ear of his personal bodyguard, “Kill this warrior while he sleeps tonight.”

The bodyguard nodded and stood back as Son approached the throne.

“Welcome warrior.” said the king of War. “Because you have defeated those who would defeat you I will grant you one wish, and you will have the honor of serving me at my right hand. Now drink with me brother.”

The king called for his slaves to be brought from his quarters.

Three women approached from behind the throne. They were all naked and chained together. Two held glasses and one held a bottle of wine. The king was given one glass and Son was given the other. Son was not impressed as he studied the king.

As Son was thinking about what he should wish for, the woman with the bottle of wine approached and filled the kings’ glass. As she did this, Son could see bruises on her back. When Son saw this he became angry, for he knew she had been struck.

The woman turned to fill Sons’ glass. She did not raise her head and her hair covered her face as she poured the wine. When the wind blew her hair moved with it and her face was revealed. It was Lyla. When Son saw Lyla, he felt his strength renewed.

Lyla looked up into Sons’ eyes and when she saw him she forgot she was pouring the wine. Suddenly the king yelled out as the wine overflowed from Sons’ cup.

“¡You fool!” shouted the king as he grabbed Lyla by the hair and threw her back.

Son watched as Lyla fell to the ground tripping over the chains, and he was furious though he did not show it.

“¿So what is it that you wish for warrior?” asked the king as he raised his glass.

Son looked into the kings’ eyes and without warning he swiftly stabbed the king through the heart with his sword of hate. Both cups fell to the ground. Wine and blood stained the floor. The bodyguard was shocked at the speed that Son moved with and found it pointless to draw his sword because the king was already mortally wounded.

The king looked into Sons’ eyes with great hatred. Son said, “My sword requires a sheath.”

“I will be avenged.” The king said before he fell to the ground with the sword still in him.

Son shed one tear as he looked down on the corpse of the king because he knew he had broken his vow to never kill again. For a moment there was silence. The people were not sure what was happening and the soldiers stood in shock. Then the captain of all the soldiers approached Son.

“My men and I owe you our lives. It will be an honor to serve you, my King.” the captain said as he touched his hand to his neck wound and held out his bloody hand to Son.

Son put his hand over his own wound and exchanged a bloody handshake with the captain.

“Now we are brothers.” said the captain.

Then the captain took Sons’ hand and raised it above his head. The people in the stadium watched as the soldiers lifted Son onto their shoulders.

“¡The old king is dead!” the captain announced to the people.

“¡Long live the King!” the soldiers shouted as they raised Son into the air.

“¡Long live the King!” the crowd began to shout.

When the soldiers put him down one of them went to the old kings’ corpse and began to pull out the sword for Son. Son told the soldiers to bury the old king with the sword still in his heart.

Son then ordered that the three slave girls be released. Their chains were unlocked and Son approached Lyla who stood still. Son knelt on one knee like a soldier waiting to be knighted by royalty. He held Lylas hands, looked into her eyes and said, “You saved me from darkness, and I would make you my Queen if you would make me your King. Be my Goddess, and I shall be your God.”

Lyla smiled and said, “Then arise my King, for I am yours.”

Verse 22:

Son stood up and picked up Lyla as she put her arms around his neck. Lyla directed Son to their quarters.

The sun had set and it was hard to see as Son reached for the handle to open the door to his new quarters.

Son walked into the room with Lyla in his arms and was blinded by the great light that came from the fire in the fire pit.

“Welcome home.” said Lyla as she looked into Sons’ eyes. Son felt the warmth of love as he held Lyla, and saw the glow of love in her eyes. Lyla felt and saw as Son did. They bathed together and Son washed the dirt from Lylas’ long hair as she washed the blood from his long locks. Then Lyla bandaged Sons’ wounds as he kissed her bruises.

They made love through the night. From that night on, their love only grew.

When the sun rose, Son fell asleep as Lyla ran her fingers through his locks. She soon fell asleep too.

The captain of the army stood guard outside with many other soldiers who respected Son as a God of the battlefield.

Verse 23:

Soon stories spread through the kingdom and lands far beyond about the warrior who fought like a God and defeated the army of the kingdom of War single handedly without killing a single soldier.

Men came from all places to join the army of the new King of War. They heated their swords over fire and branded their own necks with their blades to leave the same scar that Son had on his neck from the legendary battle. The women of the kingdom loved Son because he had spared the lives of

their husbands and children, who had served the old king of War in the battle against Son. The people loved Son because he was a fair and just ruler. The people also loved their new queen, whose beauty inspired stories and songs that spread across the land. She too was a fair and just ruler.

Even though they were loved by most, there were still those who wished to avenge the old king of War.

In the early days of their reign, Son and Lyla strove to turn the kingdom of War into a Kingdom of peace. Instead of waging war against other lands, they negotiated and gained allies.

Those who hated Son sent an assassin to kill him. The assassin dressed in the same clothing as the soldiers. When the time came for training, all of the soldiers gathered and were trained by their superiors and Son. The bodyguards also trained because their task was the most difficult.

“Taking life is easy. Saving life requires great skill.” Son said to his men.

Suddenly the assassin broke ranks with the soldiers and shot a poisonous dart at the back of Son's neck. As the dart was about to make impact, a hand reached out and stopped it.

Son turned around to see the bodyguard of the old king of War with the dart pierced through his hand. The bodyguard looked at Son and then collapsed to the ground.

The assassin was captured and the bodyguard was taken to the healers. Lyla helped to heal the bodyguard, who lived because the dart went through his hand, and did not dispense as much poison as the assassin had intended.

The assassin told Son who had sent him. Three members of the royal court had ordered the hit on Son. Son banished them from the land and hired his would be assassin to make antidotes for poisons.

Verse 24:

When the bodyguard healed, Son watched over him. “¿What is your name warrior?” Son asked the bodyguard.

“I am called Guard.” he replied.

Son asked Guard about his past and Guard only said, “War is all I know and all I have ever known.”

The captain of the guards did not know anything about Guard. It was only known that Guard was a good soldier, had skill equal to the captain and had saved the old king of War from other assassins before Son.

When Son studied Guard he was reminded of himself when he was in ninja warrior training. Because he had risked his life to save Son, Son decided to trust Guard. He took Guard under his wing and trained him. Son taught Guard everything he had learned from his teachers and personal experience. After much time passed, Son and Lyla adopted Guard as a son. Guard became Sons’ personal bodyguard as well.

Verse 25:

All the while, Son had been searching for new members for the royal court. Son went into the kingdom dressed as a beggar. He went to the houses and begged the people for gold. Many people turned away in disgust but one man did not.

“I do not have gold, but you may share what little food I have my brother.” the peasant said to Son.

Son ate with the man and then made him a member of his royal court. In the same manner, Son picked two other people to represent the people of the kingdom in the royal court.

Soon the kingdom of War was transformed from a place of hatred to a place of peace. Word spread over many lands and many travelers came to see the Kingdom and give respect to the King and Queen.

One day a family of wanderers came to the Kingdom to sell goods. Son and Lyla were walking in the marketplace and a man calling Sons’ name approached. Guard stopped the man before he came any closer.

“¡Son! ¿Do you not remember your brother?” the man asked.

Son looked at the man closely and realized that it was his little brother who had grown to a man. Son embraced his brother and invited his family to stay in the castle for as long as they wished. He introduced Lyla to his family and she was welcomed with open arms. All was well in Sons’ Kingdom and Son had almost everything he had ever wanted.

Verse 26:

Stories of Sons’ greatness continued to reach distant lands. One winter night an old woman and two hunters came to the Kingdom to speak with the King.

Son granted them an audience. The hunters were asked to wait at the door while the old woman entered to speak with Son.

Son sat in a throne and Lyla sat in a throne by his side.

“I am the oracle of my village. I come to see the King who fights as a God fights. The King who fought even after his throat had been cut. The King who defeated an army without making widows out of wives. Surely you have tasted the water of immortality and know its secrets. My people seek your wisdom.” the oracle said as she bowed down to the King.

“I know not of what you speak.” Son told her.

When the Oracle raised her head she looked into Son's eyes and became very excited.

“¡It is you!” she exclaimed. “¡You are her son! I see her when I look into your eyes! Surely the prophecy will soon be fulfilled.” she continued as she came closer and closer to Son.

Guard stood in front of the oracle to stop her, but Son allowed her to approach him. Lyla was skeptical of the oracle but said nothing.

“¿Who do you believe me to be?” asked Son.

“You are the son of the Goddess.” The oracle told him.

The oracle told Son that she had traveled from the Land of Mortality. She told him of the Goddess who had come to live with the Mortal long ago.

“When the Mortal and the Goddess were banished from my village, she was with child. The oracle before me prophesied that the son of the Goddess would return to the Land of Mortality with everlasting life in his hands.

You are her son, for you have the strength of a God yet you are mortal because your father was a mortal. Surely fate has brought me to you.” said the oracle with great conviction.

“Tell me more about the water of immortality.” Son said to the oracle.

The oracle told Son that after being cast out by the people, the Mortal and the Goddess were tracked back to the forest in the desert by other hunters from the village. Only one of the hunters returned to the village to tell what he had seen. He said the pool of immortality was guarded by Death itself.

After the oracle told Son this, she offered to guide him to the Land of Mortality, where he would then be led by the old hunter to the pool of immortality.

Lyla excused the oracle from the room so she and Son could discuss what the oracle had said.

“¿What say you my love?” Lyla asked Son.

“I must go.” Son said as if he was obligated to take the oracles’ offer.

“¿You are the King!” Lyla laughed. “You must do only as you wish.”

“It is my destiny.” Son explained.

“¿Why do you fear Death?” asked Lyla.

“I do not fear Death. I go to face Death. I go to defeat Death. I will become stronger than Death.” said Son.

“Even if you drink the water of immortality it will bring you no joy.”

Lyla said as she tried to dissuade Son from going.

“I will fill a sack with water from the pool of immortality and I will not drink the water until I return to you so that we may drink, and live together for always.”

Verse 27:

Lyla did not approve of Sons’ quest, but she would not be left behind. Son felt that it would be too dangerous for Lyla to join him, but he had to compromise by letting her ride with him to the land of Mortality. There she would wait while Son journeyed on to the forest in the desert to find the pool of immortality.

Son left his brother in charge of the Kingdom and the captain of the guards stayed to continue training Sons’ army.

When he said farewell to his family Mama told Son, “You must do what you feel is right.”

With that, Son, Lyla, Guard, and an escort of five hundred soldiers led by the oracle and two hunters traveled through the jungle to the Land of Mortality.

When Son reached the Land of Mortality the people celebrated with dancing. The soldiers saw that most of the people lived in huts made of mud so they chopped down many trees in the jungle to build a fortress for Lyla to stay in until the return of Son. They also helped build log cabins for the people.

The oracle told the people that the ‘prophecy of the son’ would be fulfilled by the King. Son told the people that any who came with him would be allowed to drink from the pool of immortality. Many of the hunters joined him. Guard wanted to come, but Son commanded him to stay in the Land of Mortality to guard Lyla in his absence. Guard reluctantly obeyed.

Lyla was upset with Son and she let him know this the morning of his departure.

“After I return we will have forever to do anything you wish, but now I must go.” Son told her.

“All we have is now. The future is uncertain, even for an oracle.” Lyla replied.

Verse 28:

When the sun rose, Son and his men began their quest, led by the old hunter.

“If you wish to be immortal you must first face Death.” the old hunter warned Son.

Son had offered the old hunter a great sum of gold to lead the way but the old hunter refused to take payment for his services. When Son asked him why he would return to a place he feared so much without payment the old hunter said, “I sinned against your father when I voted to cast him and your mother out of our village. If I help you, perhaps your mother and father will forgive me.”

Son and his soldiers traveled past the Land of Mortality and into the desert that led to the forest. Many hunters and soldiers joined Son on his quest for immortality. Many men were killed by the desert. The heat in the day made them fall. The cold in the night made them freeze.

Half of the men made it through the desert and into the forest that held the pool of immortality. The old hunter led Son to a river and Son drank from it. As he drank from the river Son felt life flowing through his veins.

After drinking, Son and his men made a path through the forest as they followed the river.

The forest killed many men. The wolves, panthers, and tigers hunted the hunters. The mosquitoes bit soldiers under their armor, and the soldiers grew sick and soon died.

Eventually the only people from the original party left alive were Son, the old hunter, and a soldier. As they traveled on they could hear the sound of the waterfall as the water crashed into the pool.

The old hunter suggested that they wait until daylight before going to the pool of immortality. Son agreed so they made camp and waited for daybreak. They decided to take turns guarding each other while the others slept. The soldier volunteered to be the first to guard so the old hunter and Son relaxed. Son looked at the moon as it shone down on him and he thought of Lyla, as he had every day and night since his departure. At that same moment Lyla looked at the moon as it shone down on her and thought of Son. Son soon fell asleep.

Suddenly Son awoke to the sound of the old hunter shouting, “¡Awake Son!”

Son woke just in time to roll out of the way as a sword swung past his head and struck the earth where he had been lying. Son looked up to see the soldier holding the sword.

“¡He has gone mad!” the old hunter shouted.

As the old hunter said this, the soldier cut him down with the sword. The soldier then turned to Son and said, “The power of immortality will be mine and mine alone.”

The soldier then attacked Son. Son was unarmed so he dodged the blade as the soldier swung. The soldier had hoped to kill Son while he slept, but that plan had failed and the soldier became afraid. After realizing that he could not kill Son, the soldier turned and ran in hopes of reaching the pool of immortality before Son could.

Son gave chase through the moonlit forest. The tall grass and trees stopped at the rocky base of the pool, which was positioned on the top of a slope. The sound of the water crashing down grew louder and the mist grew thicker.

The soldier had distanced himself from Son and was growing closer and closer to the pool. Son was close behind, but feared he would be too late to stop the soldier from drinking the water of immortality.

Son watched in horror as the soldier dropped the sword and filled his hands with water from the pool of immortality.

As the soldier was raising the water to his lips, his body was suddenly crushed in the coils of a great serpent. Son watched in awe as the creature raised its head foot by foot into the sky until it towered above him. The serpents' eyes glowed red like embers in a fire. Son looked into the creatures' eyes and said, "I do not fear you Death. I am Son, and I have come to claim my birthright."

Verse 29:

The serpent hissed and bared its' fangs at Son. It spit venom at Son but Son dodged the venom and picked up the sword that the soldier had dropped. When the serpent surrounded Son with its coils Son struck with the sword, but the serpent moved too quickly to be mortally wounded.

The serpent struck again and again as Son dodged and countered the strikes. It was an epic dance of death.

When the serpent lowered its head to strike Son, Son would strike back. The creature struck and missed as Son swung with all of his strength in an attempt to decapitate it. The serpent dodged Sons' death strike, and bit into Sons' right arm. At that same moment, Lyla, who was still looking at the moon, stepped on a deadly snake which struck her leg. The venom began to spread through her veins.

Meanwhile, the serpent, who now had Sons' arm in its' deadly grip raised Son high into the air above the pool. Son felt the poison spreading through his veins and he knew he would soon be dead if he did not act.

Then with all of his might, Son tore into the serpents' flesh with his left hand and ripped the creatures' spinal chord from its' brain.

The serpent dropped Son, and Son fell with the serpents' body, crashing with the falling water into the pool of immortality. The force of the waterfall pushed Son down to the bottom of the pool. Son swam to the surface and began to cough up some of the water he had swallowed accidentally. He could feel the venom from the serpent poisoning his body. It was hard for Son to focus on anything but the pain, but he managed to pull himself out of the pool. Soon the venom reached his heart.

Son felt the pain of Death upon him, yet he did not die. He stood up, and yelled out a roar of victory for all of the forest to hear.

Verse 30:

Son filled his wine sack with water from the pool of immortality and held the sack so that it hung over his back. He looked to the moon as it shone down on him and then began his journey back to Lyla.

The horses and camels that were taken on the journey to the pool had been eaten by predators. Son was forced to run back through the jungle and across the desert.

Verse 31:

Lyla waited for Son as she lay in a large bed in the wooden fortress. The venom from the snake had now spread through her veins and the village

healers could not help her. Even Lyla, who was skilled in the art of healing, could not lessen her own pain.

Much time passed as Lyla waited for her love to return. She was a patient woman, but she felt that something had gone wrong with Sons' quest.

Lyla asked Guard, who had been under her command in Sons' absence, to organize a search party to find Son. Guard rode out alone into the desert to wait for Son to return, but he did not organize a search party.

As Son ran across the desert, he was caught in a sand storm. He became lost for many days, but used the stars to guide his path when the sandstorm had passed. Son felt the pain of hunger and thirst over the days until he collapsed in the desert sand. He felt the pain of Death upon him, yet he did not die. Overcoming his pain with determination, Son rose to his feet and continued his journey back to his beloved. He still carried the sack of water from the pool of immortality across his shoulder. Son ate a snake to lessen the pain of hunger, and drank from a cactus to quench his thirst. It was there in the desert that Son faced his innermost fears and became fearless.

Days later Son climbed over a mountain of sand and he could see the wooden fortress in the village. He knew then that he had returned to the Land of Mortality and would soon be with his love.

As Son walked down from the mountain of sand he was greeted by Guard, who rode on a horse. Guard jumped off of the horse with his sword drawn.

"¡Halt!" "¿¡What is your name?!" Guard shouted as he approached Son.

“Peace be with you my son. It is I, Son. Put away your sword.” Son answered.

“Forgive me my Lord. I did not recognize you.” Guard apologized as he began to put away his sword while advancing closer to Son.

Son had the sack of water over his back with the strap held in one hand, so he extended the other arm to embrace Guard.

Suddenly Guard attacked Son, stabbing him through his chest. The sword went through Sons’ back and cut through the sack that held the water from the pool of immortality. The water poured down Sons’ back and evaporated on the hot desert sand.

“I have waited long for this day.” said Guard as he looked with hate into Sons’ eyes. “I saved your life before, because I promised myself that I would be the one to kill you.” Guard continued. “You spared the life of every man who tried to kill you on the day you became King, but you murdered my father, the old king of War. I knew I could not kill you unless you trusted me. Now die knowing that the old king of War has been avenged!” Guard said as he twisted the blade in Sons’ chest.

Son felt the pain of Death upon him, yet he did not die. He let go of the now empty sack and pulled Guard closer to him in a firm embrace.

“I am sorry for any pain I have caused you, my son.” said Son.

Guard staggered back in shock as Son pulled the sword from his chest.

“That’s not possible.” said Guard fearfully as he backed away.

Son said nothing as he mounted Guards' horse and rode back to the Land of Mortality.

Verse 32:

When Son arrived in the Land of Mortality the oracle told him what had happened to Lyla. He went with great haste to the wooden fortress where his wife lay in bed waiting for him.

Son knelt by her side and held her hand.

"I am here my love." he said.

"Hold me close to you." said Lyla.

Son lay next to Lyla in their bed and he held her. As Son held Lyla, he wished for nothing more than to feel her close to him for always.

Son began to sob. Lyla soothed him as she wiped away his tears and ran her fingers through his locks. She asked him, "My love, why do you cry?"

He said, "My love is dying."

Lyla kissed Son and said, "Your love will never die."

Son told Lyla everything that had happened on his quest, from his departure to his return. He told her, "Wait for me my soul; and I will ride back to the pool of immortality and bring back more water for you to drink. Wait for me."

Lyla looked into Sons' eyes as tears filled her own and said, "My love, I will wait forever."

With that, Lyla closed her eyes and breathed her final breath.

Son placed his ear over Lylas' chest and he knew her heart was no longer beating. At that moment Sons' heart stopped beating and Son felt the pain of Death upon him, yet he did not die.

Verse 33:

Son commanded everyone who was in the fortress to get out. When the oracle asked him to bring her more water from the pool of immortality Son told her, "It will bring you no joy."

Son took a torch and set the wooden fortress on fire. He lay in the bed next to Lylas' lifeless body and asked Death to take him.

The moon was divided as it shone down on the blue flames that rose higher and higher into the sky. The fire burned for days and when the flames were gone, the embers still burned until all that was left of the fortress was ashes.

Verse 34:

As the wind blew, the ashes and dust were blown into the sky. The people of the Land of Mortality watched in awe as Son rose like a phoenix from the ashes. All of his hair had been burned to ash, yet his bare skin appeared to be unharmed.

The people dropped to their knees as the oracle yelled out, "¡All hail Son, the Immortal God, son of the healing Goddess, son of the great Mortal!

Son walked through the crowd as the people moved aside. Guard stood in Sons' path.

“Forgive me.” said Guard as he offered his sword to Son.

“Bury it, and remember all that I taught you. You are forgiven.” Son told Guard as he placed his hand on the blade.

Son continued to walk back into the desert.

“¿Where are you going?” the oracle asked Son.

“Home.” said Son as he continued walking.

Some hunters from the village followed Son hoping that he would lead them back to the pool of immortality. To make sure he was not followed, Son walked around the world and swam through the seas. He ran beside wolves, slept in the dens of lions, flew with birds, and swam beside sharks without fear. It was a path that no mere mortal could follow.

After wandering through this world, Son used the stars to guide him back to the pool of immortality. As Son approached the pool he saw thousands of deadly snakes guarding it, but the snakes did not strike as he walked past them.

Final Verse:

The moon was full as it shone on Son, who looked at the waterfall and the pool before him. Son reflected on his life and everything he had learned, but mostly he thought of what Lyla had told him.

And so it was that the God washed away his immortality in the pool of the waterfall...

