

She awoke alone. Not that she had any knowledge of companionship to realise it was missing. She lifted her head to gaze out at a horizon made up of a blank white nothingness. As if everything had been washed away, or had nothing come to be? She felt lost though she was unable to identify this sensation as lost. In hindsight that's perhaps how she would describe it. It was hard to discern the space she had found herself in. Was it endless? Or was it small? Could she reach its edge? She was yet to fully get up. Weight held up by her arms. Still, without any sensation passing across her senses. Was it light or was it dark? What were the concepts of light and dark? She was unaware of the answers to a single question that you or I might ask, for she hadn't realised that they needed to be asked. She had experienced nothing. A newborn in the body of an adult. A beautiful girl unable to be categorised with something as pointless to her as age.

Her white hair shifted across her body as she sat up completely. It shimmered in a way that made it discernable from the vast blank white that engulfed her surroundings. Green eyes sparkled like emeralds. Her complexion softer than the white, a shade darker perhaps. Her ruby red lips fell open a little as she gazed out. Had her features been carved from precious stones? It was impossible to know as such stones still had no separate existence. Captivating even in this newborn state. As if she had been created to be nothing but the most beautiful thing anyone had ever set their eyes upon.

She ran a finger along the space beneath her. Her hands delicate as the finest porcelain, without the slightest hint of imperfection. There was no chill or heat to the air. A beautiful confused creature all alone, naked against the white, not that such a concept yet existed. Nor could be described to be nude in any human sense. She lacked the defining features. Just soft curves that made up her body.

It was then that she spotted it. The only item within this realm alongside her. Surprising really that it took her so long to see amongst such unending nothingness. She didn't have a name that she knew to call the thing. Plucking it up, she admired it with shimmering jade eyes. A simple and yet elegant thing. Coated mostly in black with tassles of gold that spiraled across its thin cylindrical shape. A small point at one end. For the first time her blank canvas of a mind filled with thought. As if she had grown possessed she had a sudden burning desire. She put the point to the surface beneath her, her hand starting to move without her in different shapes. A black line left behind in memory of the movements. They were yet to be named, these traces of black which tainted the purity of the white, although eventually they would come to be known as words.

She stood at the edge of a cliff carpeted in green. The soft blades caught upon a breeze causing them to sway and ripple much like the huge body of water she looked out upon. She had created these things. Such vastly different creations that she had described with the use of her treasured item and words. She could create anything with it. The world only bound by her imagination. The strands of her hair fluttering on the same breeze that rippled across the plains. She gazed out across the blue she'd named the ocean. In her time within this world she'd grown to experience a sensation that later would be called loneliness. Perhaps something in her image is what she would create next. A companion that she could speak to. Share her thoughts. She was yet to have ever spoken words. Knowing them only as the drawn thoughts she created with. Could she make something like that? How would she write it? She took out a piece of the old white world. An item she had many of. Taking a perch on the high cliff, legs hanging off the edge, she began to write endlessly. So many parts and things to describe. Though she realised

despite owning all the things she wished to write about, she had never seen her own face. Having never considered the idea of looking upon oneself, she had never created a reflection. Not even the blue of the sea reflected things yet. She continued to write all the same. Describing vaguely features she was yet to understand.

She folded pieces of the old world carefully into her shape. Using so many to recreate her curves. Once completed she looked upon this silhouette of herself she had created in white. An origami woman stood by her side. She touched her lips against it in a kiss. The creation filled with colour which spread rapidly from the touch of her ruby lips. It seemed that she could not aptly describe the colours that made up her being, for the ones of her creation were the opposite. Skin coated in a soft grey, hair a perfect black. Having also lacked a description for a face the creation had none. The only place where you could still tell the figure was made from paper. Visible folds making out the shape of its features.

She looked at it over her shoulder. Perhaps she was disappointed with her failure, though she didn't voice such things. The creation turned its head to 'look' at her. It said nothing of course for it did not have the lips to speak. It took a seat beside her. A contrast of white and black hanging over the cliffs edge.

“Would you like a name?”

The creation looked at her with a rather literally blank face. The light of this world had set, replaced by the many dotted lights which she had painted upon the sky, only to appear when darkness fell. She lay against a tree. She had made many different things. The landscape changing constantly bending to new ideas. To create something beautiful. A tranquil still world of wonders. The only life contained within it the two of them. The creation continued to 'stare'.

“You remember what a name is don't you?”

The creation shook its head. She only smiled in return.

“A name is what we call something.”

The arm of the creation lifted. A finger pointed at her.

“What's my name?”

She realised having been asked this voiceless question that she to had nothing to be called.

“I don't have one either...”

She'd never needed a name before. The creation

took a piece of the old world and her precious item and made her marks across the white.

Shiro

However nothing happened with the page it remained just that.

“That's what you want to be called?”

The creation shook its head. Lifting it's finger once more to point at her.

“That's my name?”

She smiled brightly as she asked this, the world

seeming to brighten with it. The colours that surrounded them growing just as bright.

“Then I'll call you Kuro.”

The word Shirokuro would go on to be used in only a single language of the world. Meaning something that is both black and white at the same time. An impossible colour.

“What is that you're doing?”

Kuro looked up to meet Shiro's curious gaze, away from the paper she held in her lap. Kuro quickly hid the page the moment she realised she was there.

"Show me."

Tilting her head and showing as much reluctance as a faceless creation could, she presented the piece of the old world in two outstretched hands. Head down as if embarrassed to meet Shiro's gaze. Shiro took the sheet. A drawing of her held in her hands. She'd never seen her own face before. Rather than a familiarity she had assumed it was her based upon the fact no other being existed to be drawn.

"Is this me? It's beautiful."

The faceless Kuro nodded.

"And what's this?"

Shiro asked pinching a sheet from the stack at Kuro's side. There were so many of them. Different drawings of things. It was hard to understand what they were. Shiro ran a finger lightly along the curves of the lines.

"What are these?"

Of course this question went unanswered.

Kuro only watched silently.

"Are these creations? Ones like you?"

Kuro nodded. Shiro smiled softly, a smile that brought further radiance to the world. The blossoms of the tree they sat beneath echoed the warmth she offered as flowers blossomed alongside her happiness. She took a seat cross-legged beside Kuro taking a fresh piece of the old world. She wrote upon the piece having offered not another word. She folded it briskly with folds too complex for the curious Kuro to follow as she watched intently over Shiro's shoulder. A shape matching the drawing began to take form. A small creation. She kissed it upon what she'd

named a beak. Colours spread quickly across its body. Round in shape with brown feathers and a red breast. It sat there for a moment looking at them both before hopping across the grass and taking flight. Chirping as it did so. Kuro watched the creation fly away. Shiro in turn watched her with a smile.

“What do we call it?”

Kuro took up a piece of paper and carefully transcribed the new word with nimble strokes before presenting it excitedly, so close to Shiro's face she had to lean back to read it.

A Robin

Kuro was beginning to fade. She lay there, her head on Shiro's lap. Lying on a soft bed of grass surrounded by flowers that had bloomed around the outline of her body. A riotous mix of colour, that contrasted with the fading grey. Shiro gazed peacefully on to the folded features of Kuro and ran her hands softly through her black hair. The white of her fingers entwining with the black. It seemed to happen with all creations, though Kuro had outlived them for centuries. The light of the world shone brightly upon a blue sky as clouds swirled across it on a slight wind, constantly shifting and taking new forms. Kuro pointed at one silently, a cloud that had taken the shape of a whale. A creature of the sea. Shiro had brought them to life when experimenting with the size of her living creations. It had taken so long she had never tried anything bigger. She smiled at the memory of its creation. Kuro had been so excited. Hastily offering everything Shiro had needed. Kuro loved creations, or perhaps creating. Not that she could create in the same manner that Shiro did. She always drew. In their time together the world had grown full with life and many creations were of Kuro's design. However, the world was still far from crowded. The creature, known as man, was yet to even be attempted. The closest and only step in this

direction had been the creation of Kuro. A soft breeze sighed across the plains they sat upon, the grass swaying and whistling slightly as the air passed between its blades. A few birds twirled with one another across the sky, They swooped with such elegance, as they pirouetted around one another in courtship. Shiro had never specifically written love. It had just seemed to come to be. Perhaps after she herself had found this emotion in her heart for Kuro. All creations sought companionship. It had been one of Shiro's favourite moments in the life-span of her works, writing ways that the creations could display their affections for one another. Seeing such love made her feel contented with her world, a soft tingle passing across her skin as she became caught up in the moment of courtship the creations shared, as if she herself were a part of their love. It was possible that she was. After all every being started with her. Shiro took her attention back to Kuro, who had also been captivated by the display, though soon the birds disappeared from sight. Flying beyond realms they could reach.

“What is it you want to be?”

Kuro turned her head to look at her. Gazing with admiration from blank eyes. It looked like she was considering this question. Unsure about the answer.

“Your favourite creation?”

The thoughtful Kuro shook her head.

However it seemed to spur on the decision she came to. Though her arm seemed a little tired and weak when she pointed.

“My favourite?”

Kuro nodded slowly. Shiro only smiled, the plains of grass they sat in suddenly filling with the vibrancy of blossoming flowers. Bursting open like fireworks, spreading rapidly across the grass. Shiro stroked Kuro's cheek affectionately. The crinkle of her paper features under her thumb. She could tell it was time. She always felt it somewhere within herself any time one of her

creations grew close to its end. Kuro took hold of Shiro's hand and gave it a squeeze. Neither of them were really sad. She wouldn't be gone, not truly. Shiro's smile softened.

"I love you."

As she said the words Kuro's form began to crumble, falling away into many smaller pieces. Losing her soft grey colour as it washed away to a pristine white. Each fragment taking the shape of a butterfly which fluttered briefly into the air. Wings spread as they floated on the breeze as if they danced amongst one another, the blue of the sky catching in their pure whiteness. Shiro watched, heart filled with so many emotions she had never named. Enraptured by the moment. Holding out her hand for one to settle. It stilled its elegantly-cut wings, that appeared to be crafted from paper. Eventually as if drawn to this one, they all flocked to her hand. Returning to what they once had been. Blank pieces of the old world. A smile still painted on her lips, Shiro began to write. Words she'd never thought of. She wanted this to be the most beautiful form she had ever created. The creature she so eloquently described was a cat. One that would live for nine lifetimes.

"Do you think this one will work?"

"Perhaps..."

"HmMMM you don't sound very confident."

"The being you're trying to create is a complex one."

Shiro glanced over at the cat who watched her avidly with bold golden eyes.

"It's nice to talk with you Kuro. I've never spoken with anyone before."

"That's because you gave me a mouth this time."

Kuro smiled in jest, finding a warm spot to curl up in amongst the grass. Shiro laughed.

“I'm sorry.”

They both looked upon the creation. Much like when Shiro had made Kuro it stood tall like a blank reflection. Humanoid in shape. Shiro planted a kiss that filled the being with colour. With life.

There was so many of them now. The smartest of all her creations.

Once she'd made one, she had gone on to make many. All slightly different. All going on to have different lives. There was a glow a short way off. The humans had become capable of creation themselves though they created objects and didn't seem able to give life beyond their own rapid reproduction. However this was the first time either of them had seen it. Something that gave off light. Until now all of them had existed only with the ball of light that Shiro had created. They went closer, curious. Several of the creations were gathered around the light while one spoke. A strange red flower the centre of their circle. Crackling and spitting out embers which fluttered across the dark night sky like fireflies. They were captivated by the luminescence as they stood in the furthest reaches of its light. Eventually spotted by a child from the circle who beckoned them over.

“Come the Elder is about to tell a story.”

It wasn't often that either Shiro or Kuro interacted with humans. Slightly nervous to step into their circle they took a seat all the same. Kuro curled up on Shiro's lap as she sat. A soft warmth was emanating from the ever shifting red flower. The shimmering crimson petals were reflected in each one of the humans eyes. The boy who had called them offered them little attention now. Focused on the eldest member of their group. Creations aged. Not that Shiro had ever written that. A byproduct of their creation. Long grey hair lined her face and she was wrapped in

something strange, that coated her skin. Another of their creations that Shiro lacked familiarity with. When had the humans started hiding themselves, she wondered. The Elder also wore branches entwined with string in the shape of antlers on her head. A necklace of talismans draped around her neck and some heavily worn sheets of papyrus in her lap.

The Elder began to speak, though her words seemed to lack the frailty of her age.

“Long ago Princess Orihime, the seamstress, wove beautiful clothes by the heavenly river, represented by the Milky Way. Because Orihime worked so hard weaving beautiful clothes, she became sad and despaired of ever finding love. Her father, who was a God of the heavens, loved her dearly and arranged for her to meet Hikoboshi, the cow herder who lived on the other side of the Milky Way. The two fell in love instantly and married. Their love and devotion was so deep that Orihime stopped weaving and Hikoboshi allowed his cows to wander the heavens....”

The woman spoke the words with a soothing and hypnotic tone.

The red flower appearing to sparkle with her story, casting thick shadows where it couldn't reach. The darkness moved constantly as if wishing to hide from the light. It was the first time Shiro and Kuro had ever heard a story. Something passed from one human to another across the years. Shiro was transfixed. She had never heard of these beings the humans called Gods who reigned over their worlds. The story went on, every ear in the circle listening intently till its end. Once finished the children chatted excitedly with one another while Shiro remained entranced.

Shiro had heard something, a cry for help that had disturbed her from her writing.

A voice of panic. She followed the call. Weaving between the trees till she found her summoner. A rabbit tangled in a mess of blood. Its foot caught up in some contraption that could only have come from the humans. The rabbit was fading. She could feel the sensation of its ending life within herself. It scrambled desperate to free itself from this thing that held it captive. Eyes wide and a heart that thundered. She crouched down to it, a sadness consuming her. How could they leave such a thing so carelessly where other creatures ran and played? She freed it from the shackles though it could now no longer move. Lying there and growing increasingly still. She stroked it behind the ear. Offering what little comfort she could, knowing saving it was beyond her ability. It was as she watched over it that a human boy appeared from the bushes. A jump of celebration as he spotted the fallen rabbit. She looked at the child with a deep sadness enveloping her. She had had no idea that any of her creations could be so cruel. Not understanding the intentions of the child. She asked him directly.

“Was it you that did this?” Her words frail and sombre. The boy took his attention away from the animal to look at her face, filled with confusion.

“This is what my father does to feed us.”

The boy stated this as if it was obvious, freeing a knife from his belt. The blade gleaming silver with an intent that crawled across Shiro's skin.

“No other creation does this to another.”

“My father says it's because we're the smartest. Learning how to use the land and its gifts is something all children must do before they reach adulthood.”

The sadness seemed to grow in Shiro's chest. Festering there painfully.

“No animal exists as a gift to be sacrificed to another. None of you need to kill. You are all surrounded by plenty”

She looked at the rabbit. Taking it into her arms, its breath grew shallow as even the twitching of its nose slowed. Crimson tainted her body, red roses blooming from the stains. The boys features grew violent.

“That's mine.”

Shiro stood turning her back to the boy.

“No child. It is not.”

Shiro hurried across the plains. She could see the dancing flowers the humans called *fire*. A story, a vital lesson to tell. One that brimmed with her imagination. One that had been vast enough to create this world. She stopped for a moment as she became surrounded by trees. Close enough she could hear the excited chatter of the children as they waited once more for the Elder. Lanterns draped between the branches were reaching deep into the forest with outstretched fingers of light. The chirping of crickets nestled in the darkness offered her company. Would they understand its message? She grew nervous. Perhaps they would scoff at her too, just like the Elder. These thoughts spiralled into self doubt that kept her frozen there in the shadows, interrupted only by the appearance of golden eyes glittering with the trapped embers of distant flames, as if their shape was made with the dust of gold.

“You hesitate to tell them your story?”

Kuro appeared from the night. The shadows cast from the lanterns shifting across her soft grey fur. Her comment served only to make Shiro's nerves more tangible.

“Do you think they'll like it?”

Kuro looked at her as if this question made her a little sad.

“I struggle to imagine any creations

not loving a story written by you. It is your descriptions that created them and they are all incredible creatures.”

Shiro nodded. This was her chance to correct their wrong turn. She stepped free from the trees where everyone in the circle around the red flower waited patiently. Whispering excitedly amongst each other. The Elder was yet to arrive it would seem, for her seat lay vacant. Eyes filled with anticipation fell upon Shiro briefly, who took this moment to speak softly at first, allowing her planned words to flow out of her in a bright stream.

“While we wait for the Elder... Would you listen to my story?”

The boy’s face lit up. Shiro recognised him as the one who had first beckoned her to join them. Eyes widening as if the question had placed a sparkle within them. He beamed brightly.

“Shiro, you have a story!?”

He asked, his face flooded with anticipation as he fidgeted excitedly on the log he and a few other children were perched on.

“I have... Would you like to hear it?”

The boy nodded exaggeratedly. A nod that spread to the other children of the circle. This finally made Shiro smile. For a moment it seemed like a new light broke through the blackness of the night. A soft white, dispelling all shadow. Adding a sparkle to the air. Shiro took a seat. A smile still on her lips as she began.

“Long long ago there was a Fox. He was an ancient creature of the forest.

His eyes sharp and vulpine with his coat a bright orange as if he had captured the shades of autumnal leaves. He had watched over the inhabitants for decades. One day the Fox spotted a Human. He had never seen one before and so he crept as close as he could and watched with curious eyes. The Human also had his eyes fixed on something intently. A majestic Stag with an imposing crown of bone, stood peacefully in a clearing a short way off. The feeling came with a

sudden wave. The Fox caught its scent as it turned his stomach and polluted his nostrils. It was the taste of violence and the desire to kill that washed so unpleasantly across his tongue. But still the Fox didn't understand. What had the deer done to deserve such hostility? Until this time no animals had harmed each other. There was no need. The blessings of the forest sustained them all. The Fox went to the Human and posed his question in human tongue. 'Why would you ever wish harm this Stag?' The Human answered calmly and without shame or fear. 'Because I must, for the sake of my family. Winter comes and with that there will be no crops till spring. His coat too will provide my children with the warmth they need to survive the winter.' The Fox considered this answer for a moment. 'Then the sheep of the fields will offer you their wool and the forest shall provide its fruits, even in winter, though if you take too much the forest will die along with every creature it cares for.' The Human nodded at these words transfixed by the wise vulpine eyes.

Eventually the humans would break this promise. Unlike the other animals they were greedy creatures. The fox enraged by this betrayal cursed the village with flame and anger. For now neither the forest nor the humans would be able to survive. They had taken too much and not left enough behind. Remember children that you owe the forest for what it gives you. It is not just yours to take." For the first time since the story began she looked away from the dancing flames of the red flower. Did they understand her message? However when she finally looked upon her listeners she saw only paper. The children had lost their colour and were fading back to their original white. The seams of paper visible across their assembled bodies. Each one entirely still as if they had returned to the state before their creation. Their paper bodies rustled on the faint breeze, a complete blankness on their features. Even Kuro who had come and nestled by her feet in front of the fire had lost her grey. A cat formed from origami, as if she had never been alive at all.

A while had passed before Kuro found her again. The sun had begun to rise bleaching the sky orange with its light. Neither of them said a word of greeting, Kuro went to her side and rubbed her head on her thigh. A soft purr almost drowned out by the chirping of rising birds. Shiro still yet to speak, stroked Kuro behind the ear.

“What was it like when I told my story?”

Kuro looked at her with golden eyes that captured the horizon.

“Like sleeping. Yet I felt something. Perhaps more I saw something.

A beautiful fox that was filled with sadness.”

No one had ever dreamed before. Without a name to call it or a familiarity with the experience the idea confused them both.

“You saw it?”

“It's hazy like a fleeting memory but yes.”

“So you don't really remember?”

“Not with enough clarity to put it into words.”

Shiro sighed at this answer, still running her hand along Kuro's soft fur. Taking up her tools she began to write the story of the Fox. Though a sadness filled the strokes of her pen. Slightly slow. Perhaps she knew what might happen when she finished. She let the pen fall away as the completed piece began to crumble and fade. The paper disintegrating into grains of silver sand, shimmering in her open palms. She looked at them in silence as they glistened there brightly. Another wave of the breeze came, it took the grains from her hands filling the air with dancing pieces of glitter. She watched them fade away, letting the gust steal them from her. The air sparkling as if it had revealed the shimmering of the night stars even while the sky was bright. Like many things Shiro created, this creation would come to be known in the stories of Humans.

So many different tales that they became myth and legend. The Sandman and his sand of dreams.

One night everyone shared the same dream. A lesson for all to learn.

A great white hawk soared in the sky, purer than the fresh white of fallen snow. Eyes sharp and focused. The light of the sun captured within them. A certain radiance to its feathers, as if it had become a source of light itself. Though its gaze bore deep to all that looked upon it. Burrowing into their souls and bestowing them with the understanding of unspoken words. The white Hawk watcher of all and punisher of those who would go astray. Do not sin while under his gaze for he will swoop from the heavens with a wrath of flame and bring a lifetime of curses. He will not allow slaughter. No creature is worth more than another, no creation may take the life of another'. With these words they grew consumed with grief. Even this single moment, as they experienced the pain of suffering and loss that they had caused was almost too much. If experienced for even a second longer they might have all succumbed to insanity. As each creation woke, the lucid vision clung to them. The grasp of the dream refusing to loosen its fingers even after they shook off their slumber. And so Humans learned to dream, visions brought by trails of shimmering sand and yet so often they fail to understand the messages this gift brings them.
