The echoes of her feet pranced off the dirt walls as she walked through the descending hallway. A few torches were spread throughout the tunnel, but spaced far apart they provided little light for the majority of the passageway.

She continued down until she finally reached the door that towered above her. The thick slab of metal was thick and the sounds of her knuckles rapping against it were low and abrupt. After a few seconds with no reply she knocked again with her fist which let out a louder but more muffled echo.

The door opened without, surprisingly without a single creak. As the woman walked through the massive frame she paused to let her eyes adjust to the room. There were more torches on the surrounding walls, yet the room still seemed darker than the hallway. As her eyes adjusted she looked around the room, but nothing surprised her. It was all stuff she was used to seeing: sacrificial knives all differing in shape and size, the ceremonial ropes, a wall full of candles that burnt black, and then of course the cage.

With nothing new for her to see her eyes kept scanning the room, not stopping on anything until they grazed the man sitting on his throne like chair. He was average height and build; his white hair combed back nicely, his glasses reflecting the fire place to the side of the room.

“Sister Raena, what brings you to me?”

Raena looked around the room a bit more before responding bluntly.

“I want a birthing right”

Slightly shocked the man leaned back in his chair studying her more closely.

“That is usually assigned, not asked for. Why is it you want this?”

“I’ve been told that my child will bear the responsibility in its fullness”

Astounded the man jumped from his chair rushing over to Raena and grabbing her by the shoulders.

“Who told you this?!”

She leaned forward whispering in his ear. The man let go of her shoulders and took a step back. He slid his fingers through his hair while a smile of relief spread across his lips.

“I didn’t think I would live to see it happen. I will be the one to grant the responsibility. The name Granth Forene will be forever known among our people” his body loosened as he exhaled heavily. He looked back at Raena and recomposed himself.

“You are granted permission for a birthing right”

With that he walked over to a table that held an array of knives. He picked up a small one, the blade no longer than an inch long. It curved into a half circle so that the point was facing down. He strode back towards the woman and took a deep breath as the knife was positioned at the neck of her shirt.

He pulled the blade down severing the cloth in half. Once he reached the bottom, the shirt relaxed and hung from the shoulders. He went back to the top and cut through the arms of the shirt as well, letting it drop to the floor as the second shoulder was cut. He then cut the skirt in the same way leaving Raena standing in the room bare. The man stood back looking at her.

Her skin was fair, but still had a slight tan to it, her figure was perfectly curved and she kept herself in good health.

After a few seconds Granth walked over to the fire and pulled out a short metal stick that had been sitting in the fire. As he raised it and walked back to Raena he looked back at her to see if any doubt had shown in her face, but not a single sign of regret was on her face.

He lifted the rod horizontal to the ground and aimed the circular end to her chest, right where her heart would be. Since the stick was short he was able to put one hand on her back while the other pressed the brand into her skin.

The skin sizzled and cracked as it made contact with the burning metal, smoke rising from the wound. Pressing hard enough to burn, but not penetrate the man looked at Raena’s face. Her eyes were closed, but not strained, in fact she looked relaxed.

When Granth pulled the brand away from her, he looked at the mark. It was the symbol of their people, the shape was a box with 3 circles inside it, On top and bottom of the box are curves that made it look like backwards S with a the box in the middle. Because of the brand it also had a circle surrounding the entire symbol. The burn had never come out so clean before.

With that he put the brand onto a rack near the fireplace and opened a cupboard to pull out a black dress. He gave it to Raena who slipped the dress over her exposed body. The top of the dress was very low cut in order to show the newly achieved symbol.

Raena nodded with a slight bow towards Granth then turned and walked out of the room.

As she walked back up the slanted hallway she brushed her fingers over the burn, pain dashed through her body but she relished every sting.

Nearing the end of the passage she could see the main hall where most people gathered to converse and sell small trinkets they’ve made. Everyone’s head turned towards Raena as she strode into the room confidently. Her face was straight, no expression passed through her face even though on the inside her smile was beaming like none other.

Woman would walk up to her staring at the burn amazed at her courage, some extremely jealous. Congratulations were sung all throughout the grand hall echoing throughout the many tunnels that were connected. Chatter such as “I wonder who the birthing father will be” or “How many scars do you think she’ll take before producing”.

The birthing right was a burn that started the chain of scars to proceed. With every man she tried to get pregnant with they would carve a ring with a certain pattern around the symbol to show they tried to create the child. Two numbers were important about the rings. If the child was born with only one ring around the birthing right they were thought to be extremely strong, but they wouldn’t be able to achieve rank of leader.

After the first the more rings you have the better, it showed that you took many different attributes to create the best child. Leaders were chosen out of the few children with a birthing right of five rings as that was the most anyone has ever received.

In the midst of the crowed was a man working his way up to Raena. Though most of them wore the group attire, the man wore a suit and coat. He was one of the highest ranking and was known for being the only scar on many birthing rights. As he reached Raena everyone backed away and silenced each other.

“Sister Raena, allow me to be the first scar”

“Brother Nexel, do you believe you will be the only one to circle around my right”

“I do, and with that you know he will aspire too much”

A smile spread across Raena’s face as those words passed from his mouth, but it wasn’t one of joy or happiness, it was full of malice and deceit. She hoped his pride would be shattered by him not being the only one the surround her right with his symbol.

“I would be honored if you were the FIRST” she responded. With that Nexel nodded slightly to her and they both walked away from the now dead silent crowd.

They entered a tunnel on the side of the main hall and followed it for a couple hundred feet until reaching a small wooden door on the wall. Many other doors were spread throughout the hallway.

They were inside the tunnel that people go to try for a child. Once a year this hallway was always filled with people because that’s when birthing rights are assigned. Now it was empty because most woman were now giving birth or about to in a different hall.

The pair entered the room and started taking off their clothes. The room was bland with only a few things in it, a bed, hooks to hold clothes, a small bin in the corner, and a table that held a small knife and towels.

Once they both finished undressing Raena laid on the bed and Nexel followed. It only took a few minutes for them to finish the ritual. To them sex wasn’t a thing for pleasure, it was used only for birthing. In fact those caught doing anything of the sort for pleasure were tortured, and afterwards killed for committing a sin and desecrating a sacred function. That’s why it never takes long for the pair to complete the ritual.

After they finished Nexel walked over to the table and grabbed the knife. Raena stayed laying face up on the bed. Nexel then approached her on the side of the bed closest to her birthing right. He used one hand to press Raena to the bed and to keep her skin from moving as he carved his ring into her. Using the initial ring from the burn as a base, he started to engrave is symbol into the flesh. His symbol looked like fires encircling the entire right. After the flames were completely around the symbol he finished by encircling the flames with another ring to show the end of his mark. Raena didn’t flinch once.

After Nexel finished with the design he grabbed the towels from the table and pressed them onto the wound to get the bleeding to stop. After a couple minutes the blood stopped pouring from the wound and the pair started to clean. They took all the towels and sheets from the bed and through them into the bin and re-dressed. They both walked out of the room and parted ways.