

The Three Houses

The Book about the Three Houses

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Founder's Preface

What gaming community would be complete without their very own fantasy world within which to create adventures across various mediums? Not LDSG.

This project evolved from an idea in 2016 to create groups of people within the community that were roughly the same "type" of gamer. But as the ideas started flowing for what to call these groups and how to sort our members into them, my mind quickly caught hold on how incredibly cool it would be to have a fantasy adventure world in which to give these groups an origin, a purpose, a future.



The House of Brightbeam

The Legend of Brightbeam Lore

Excerpt taken from Chapter 1 in The Three Houses by Elise Nelson

There was a time when all the elements and attributes of humankind were bound within three beings known as the Spirits of Terra. They formed from the lack of composure the combination of their powers created. Every attribute each of them had—every passion, every power—pushed and pulled until they all tore apart, latching onto newly formed bodies. appeared after the powers they all contained, combined, couldn't be held in one unit any longer. Each of the three possessed remarkable capabilities and were born in his or her own unique way. Their attributes were neither good nor bad. It was how they were used that caused either disarray or progress. The spirit goddess of light saw this firsthand.

Lumine was known as the keeper of light and peace. She didn't wish to rule anybody or anything. She had such heightened emotional intelligence and intuition that she could see beyond the pettiness of war or the grays of disarray.

Lumine walked through the plush grass on this new planet she just bloomed upon. Humans already inhabited the Earth at this point, but there weren't many. She found it harder to find any of them than dodge their eyes. She wasn't sure what she was looking for as she walked up the grass and into the gritty mountains, the rocks scraping against her freshly formed skin; she just knew she had to get somewhere she could see it all. A starting point to finding what these humans were like, and to understand the flashes of visions she beheld as she took her first breath of life. She ached to learn whatever it was she could do for this world. Nothing else could pierce her thoughts or snag her concentration. Determination was one of her best qualities.

With every new second of consciousness, more knowledge plunged into Lumine's mind. Terror struck her one moment, and astonishment the next. Flashing before her eyes was the potential humans had on this planet. The good, the bad, the everything in between. She soon realized how

ignorant and petty humans could be. And how dangerous.

However, she also understood that there were no good or bad humans. There were only bad choices—ones that could ruin lives and pollute a soul beyond recognition. Not only did she need to find a place to live for now, but she had the strong desire to help steer humans in a better direction than their foreseen fate.

She was now more than simply a spark of intelligence and power in the universe. Lumine was personified and whole. Her own person, with autonomy and the ability to make her own paths and choices in this world. She recognized she wasn't human, but she longed to study and understand them.

As she made it onto the peak of the mountain, her eyes took in everything that rested below. Small huts made of stone and wood were clustered together, as if being alone wasn't an option for humans. Even though there were only a handful or two of them in this part of the world, they still clung together.

Her eyes narrowed as she peered down below, pushing her vision to look just a little closer. Her vision plunged into the village and she observed the humans as they spoke. It was a family. There was a man with a large belly and hairs sticking from everywhere off his face but his head; his eyes were soft and kind, and the way he looked at the woman next to him was even softer. The woman was taking something out of a cupboard and turning to speak to the children. Lumine caught the glitter of the woman's eyes, which looked like crystals as the light poured in from their windows. She smiled just as brightly, her eyes still shining beneath hair as dark as night. She looked like the moon and its stars. Running between them were three little girls, all of whom looked like different variations of the two adults. Lumine noticed the plates getting set and the chairs getting placed in an orderly fashion around a dinner table. Her eyes shifted to the man, who was taking a plump loaf of bread out of the oven, its crisp ears brown to perfection.

Then something shifted in the room, and another little girl appeared. She looked quite similar to her sisters. Two of the girls had dark hair like their mother, and two of them had ruddy hair like their father. She was one that looked like her father. Freckles dusted her nose, which dimpled when she smiled up at her mother. The woman picked her daughter up and carried her to the table. Lumine knew right away that this scene wasn't right. The girl had to be the second eldest at least, and around ten years old, and yet she was being carried. Something was wrong.

It didn't take long for Lumine to spot it. When the family members each took their seats at their table, scooting in to get as close to the roast, vegetables, and bread as possible, the freckled little girl didn't budge. Her hands picked up her utensils, and her body appeared to move just fine. All except for her legs.

She bolted upright and her vision shifted back to normal. The wind rustled leaves along her back and lifted her icy white hair in the wind. The strands trailed into the breeze like it had once been a part of it.

Her eyes flickered back to the family from the village. She can smell the lingering scent of the bread, fresh out of the oven—the sweet aroma warming the home against the chilly autumn wind. There's a knock at the door, and the man opens it. He appears to know the withered old woman who shuffles through the doorway. Her hair is as white as the mother's eyes are crystal, and her body is hunched with age. He places his hands gently on her back and leans down to kiss her on the cheek. The young girls all squeal, and three of them rush over to her, bouncing with delight.

"They long for unity and companionship...but..." Lumine's voice trailed off as she recalled the visions that struck her into consciousness when first appearing on this planet. She saw wars and carnage, pain and terror—all at the hands of one human to another. "Yet, they become masked and maddened with rivalry and the lusts of selfishness." She continued watching the family as the mother helped her disabled daughter reach up and hug the old woman entering the home. "And they suffer so much pain."

Her heart seemed to plummet from her chest to her stomach, and an overcoming desire to get up and act washed over her. She took one last look at the top of the home before striding down the mountain to face the family herself.

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A knock at the door turned the family quiet. It was as if everything in their little world, all tucked within these mountains, was in peril and that freezing and not uttering another word would keep them anchored to the lives they loved. Lumine knocked again, softer this time, but when no footsteps came forward, she called to them through the door. "I won't hurt you," she said calmly, her voice a cool balm to the ears within those walls. "I just want to help."

After another moment, Lumine heard something. She folded her hands together in her lap as she

stood tall, her head almost as high as the doorway to the small home. The knob turned and the door opened. The family was all huddled together at the table, fear evident in their eyes, all except the father. Although fear swam in his eyes too, he stood tall and answered the door with the guarded posture of someone who would look Death straight in the eyes if it meant protecting his family. "Yes?" he asked. "Who are you?"

Lumine lifted a thin hand, hoping to show that she was harmless and that she didn't want anyone to be anything but calm. The mother gathered her girls like a hen with its chicks and squeezed them tighter as Lumine approached. As the goddess knelt by the chair of the girl with paraplegia, she lifted her hand again, but this time at the mother, who was about to jump over the table. "Please. Allow me to help you." The soothing melody of her voice calmed everyone in the room, and the mother slowly sat back down, gathering her daughters as she watched in wonder at this mysterious woman with white-silvery hair that pooled to her ankles.

Lumine's lifted hand fell gracefully to the freckled girl's knees. The young child stared at the goddess, wide-eyed and apprehensive—apprehensive, but unafraid. She smiled at the little girl before closing her eyes and illuminating the entire room. Her power flooded from her fingertips and cast light on the child. The mother got to her feet, her mouth ready to yell, when the light fades and the girl is visible again. The room slowly dimmed, and the air was quiet. It was as if, for the briefest moment, time stood still.

Then a small voice crept through the stillness, uttering words even more beautiful than any balm Lumine could ever speak: "I can feel my legs...Mama, I can feel my legs!" The child's face lit up on its own now, her mouth wide with a grin showing a recently lost tooth.

"What?!" Her mother rushed around the corner of the table and fell to her knees at her daughter's chair. She held the child's hands and watched her left leg start to swing. She clasped a hand over her mouth, and her eyes reddened with tears.

"Mama, Papa, I really can feel them! I feel them!"

Her mother burst into tears and pulled her daughter into her arms, and the father soon followed. Suddenly, everyone in the entire room was huddled in a big hug, with the newly healed daughter at the very center, beaming like a star.

"Oh, Areya, how wonderful. I just, I—I can't believe I," her mother said and then cried again,

holding her daughter close. Lumine smiled at the family as she got to her feet. Once she stood, she felt a large hand cup her shoulder. She turned to see Areya's father. Tears had spilled down his cheeks from beneath his bushy brows.

He sniffed, snuffling back tears, and said, "Thank you. How can we ever repay you?"

Lumine shook her head. "It's not like that..."

"Who are you?" Another voice came from the girl's direction, but it was her mother speaking this time. Her voice wasn't rude, but it was mystified, and her eyes were a mirror image of the apprehensive gaze her daughter had worn just moments before.

Lumine smiled. "My name is Lumine. My tale is a little strange, and perhaps not one to be spoken of during such a special moment, but I am here to help all of you." She gracefully gestured to everyone in the room and then pointed toward the door. "To all humans. I have gifts I'd like to give."

"Oh, you gave us the most wonderful gift we ever could have dreamed of," the eldest woman in the room said, her voice as wobbly as her limbs, "but we can direct you to the next home if you'd like."

Lumine lets out a melodious laugh. "Oh no. I don't mean that I will be bestowing miracles upon people. No. I want to teach you—I want to teach everyone in your village—some of the skills and knowledge I possess."

"So you can teach us how to heal people like that?" one of the little girls asked; she appeared to be the eldest. She looked like a miniature of her mother, with dark hair rippling past her shoulders.

The corners of the goddess's mouth turned up, her pale eyes lit up with amusement. "No, dear, but I will show you how you can learn to find ways to heal people, but in ways that can be passed on. In ways you can study and grow from." She crosses her arms and looks at the others in the room, making eye contact with the mother of the home. "There are many things I would like to teach your people—not just in the healing arts. Would it be okay for me to live here for a while? I will do my very best to teach all of you what I can." She bowed her head, her hair sliding from behind her shoulder to the floor at her feet.

She felt a hand touch hers and looked up. It was the mother; her eyes were lit up and a soft smile

rested on her lips. Tears formed in her eyes as she said, "You healed my little girl. I would love to learn anything I can from you. I'm sure we all would." She gestured to her family, and then she cast her eyes to the wall and then looked back at Lumine. "And I'm sure the others in the village will feel the same way."

"Thank you, um..."

"Clarise," the woman said, still smiling as she wiped away tears. "My name is Clarise."

"Lumine. I'm very happy to meet you all."

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Several years passed by in the village. Lumine taught the villagers how to give one another medical care; how to understand mental and emotional health and wellbeing, as well as the physical; how to express one's self in the arts; and many, many other things. Mostly, she tried to instill good habits of self-reflection, study, and giving others the benefit of the doubt whenever possible.

Because of her, the people in the village (and in the ones close by) learned how to survive and thrive in ways they never knew possible. They learned about different sciences that aid in healing, and how to communicate with one another. She educated them on the follies of war and the hubris many humans fell prey to. She taught them as much knowledge as she thought they could take, and she always found new ways of teaching them.

She brought communities together, passed on everything she could, and made friends with and loved each and every one of them (even the ones who never seemed to trust her or learn to love her back). Then, one day, she looked out at all of them and realized they didn't need her anymore. They clung to her for advice and techniques, but she gave them all they needed to know. So, she decided it was time for her to move on to the next place. She would have loved to live with these people for as long as she possibly could, but she knew she was needed elsewhere. There were many villages just like this one all over the world, and they needed her too.

On the day of her departure, she stood in front of the villagers with tears in her eyes and a heart filled to a point she hadn't known possible. Before speaking, she looked out at their faces and caught a glimpse of Clarise, Johnny, and their girls. When her eyes landed on Areya, her heart squeezed even more. *Humans may be capable of pain and terror, as I saw in my visions, but they are also capable of so much love and compassion that if the world depended upon the most selfless human hearts imaginable, nothing could ever shatter life on Earth.*

It was all about choices. Selfishness vs. Selflessness. Lumine realized that even more now.

She smiled and blinked away tears as she spoke. "There are so many things I want to say, but even with all the lessons of communication I put you through, I can't find the words to express how truly grateful I am to have found you people, and how much I love you....and how sorrowful I am to leave." She looked out and saw others starting to cry as well, so she continued, "and there are so many things I could still teach you, but all of them stem from the same principles and the same roots of what I've already taught you. So, just remember this: You have what it takes to do great things. Feed your desire for knowledge, and you can discover nearly any answer you seek."

Areya pushed through the crowd and leapt onto Lumine, wrapping her arms around her. Lumine patted her on the back. She is now a young woman who, because of Lumine, was once a little girl who could spring up and down the hills and mountainside with her many cousins and sisters, never once having to look back at the life she lived before other than to be grateful for the blessing she was given. "Please don't leave us. It's been so peaceful since you came. We can't do this without you." Tears soaked Lumine's gown where the rosy-haired girl had her face pressed up against.

She placed her hand on Areya's head and crouched down to meet her gaze. She wiped away the young woman's tears and gave her a smile. "Don't ever doubt yourself. You're capable of amazing things." Despite being nearly fifteen, Areya rested her head against Lumine's hand and let the goddess dry her tears as she snuffled and struggled to compose herself. They were family now. An aunt and niece from different worlds. This was another lesson she taught them: it doesn't matter where anyone comes from, everyone's hearts beat the same. "You will always be in my heart," she said with a bittersweet smile, "as I will forever live in all of yours." Areya smiles up at her and gives her one last hug.

When she stepped back toward her family again, she turned to look back into the goddess's eyes and ask, "Well...is there anything else you can teach us before you leave?"

Lumine's eyes crinkled as she smiled. "Yes," she said, "Never doubt yourself, and never look down on anyone, even if that person's yourself." Areya gave her a confident smile, showing through her eyes that she knew Lumine understood her heart like any aunt or mother would. The two share a smile before Areya nods and returns to her family a few paces away.

The villagers are all grouped together as they watch their teacher part ways with them. There were twice as many people living in the little town tucked within the mountains when she left than

when she came, which warmed her heart as she waved to them all on her way out of town. She thought back on how much they'd grown, both in terms of personal growth and physical village growth. Once they became more confident about going out into the world and finding others to work with, they naturally multiplied in size. They discovered towns nearby to trade with, and people to learn and grow with. Some fell in love. Some started lucrative businesses with one another. And some simply found friends who they could share their skills and lives with.

As Lumine made her way off that mountain, there was one thing all the villagers had in mind as they watched her go: because of her, they'd never be the same.

She taught them peace, healing, and philosophies she hoped they'd ruminate on.

As she took the initial steps into her new journey, something glimmered in the sky above her. Something that sparked a familiar feeling from within--a piece of her she thought went missing when she came to upon the Earth. She watched the spot in the sky and smiled as she saw what appeared to be a horse with wings gliding towards her with the graceful ease of a small morning dove. The closer the animal got to her, the stronger the feeling inside her grew. Soon, the animal stood beside her, and when she touched its smooth coat, she felt the instant connection of a kindred spirit from outside the bounds of mortality.

She stroked the pegasus' mane with a wistful smile. "Let us go. The rest of the world awaits."

After that day, she went from place to place, traveling the entire world, teaching her philosophies and spreading her attributes to every human she could. She gave them the knowledge, and she trusted them to do the rest.

When it came time for her to part with the world, she was at peace. She knew that no matter what would happen, at least she gave the world something that gave them hope. Something that could save them, if it ever came to it. In every hour of need.

Over centuries, her gifts were passed on from generation to generation. Now, those who possess her talents belong to the honorable house of Brightbeam.

The House of Freshbeast

The Legend of Freshbeast

Excerpt taken from Chapter 2 in The Three Houses by Elise Nelson

There were three spirits who broke into the world that day, seeping deep into the earth and branching out beneath the surface. An entire elemental system sparked to life like the fire of Prometheus. Each of the three Spirits of Terra formed into embodied existence in the blink of an eye, every one of them in different locations on the Earth. The one who rose up from fire and ash, wrought with raw talents, strength, and passion beyond any mortal capability, became known as Vaellor, the eventual creator of the house of Freshbeast.

The sun was still new the day he stepped forward and appeared to the humans. Its rays were so strong it left his newly formed tongue dry with the taste of dirt. From the moment his mind sparked into this new state of being, he was flooded with every emotion, desire, passion, and pain known to mankind. It all flashed before him like looking directly into the sun after a lifetime inside a cave, each sensation attached to an image or memory he never created.

Gasps and stifled cries hummed around him as Vaellor stepped out into this strange world he now inhabited—this lively planet filled with such beauty and chaos that it made him want to scream.

Need to scream.

But he didn't.

When his wildly rattling mind tremored down into his lungs, he opened his eyes, mouth prepared to let some of this madness out, and he saw their faces. Nearly a hundred of them. All staring, gaping, wide-eyed in horror at this strange beast of a person rising from the shadows. It was at this moment that Vaellor realized just how different he was from all of them. While these human creatures all stood around the same size, most of them lean and angular, he was closer in height to some of the trees in this forest they called their home, with a stature to match. He looked down at his hands and then down at the humans'. He could sense the fear pumping through their veins as he approached, closer and closer to their homes, and to them—too frozen to move.

With each step, the ground shivered, quietly booming, as if the Earth itself were stifling a cry from the beast. He frowned. *I don't understand why they fear me so....* He searched their eyes and saw in them so much more than they saw in themselves. He saw their potential. Their wants. Their desires. Their strengths and weaknesses. And things he didn't quite understand. Things he couldn't relate to.

As he continued through the quiet village, his confusion grew. Then one of them spoke.

"You are the one who is...strength and...passion?"

Vaellor turned to the source of the voice. His eyes fell upon a human male much smaller than many of the others. The slightly hunched elderly man —by far the eldest in the group—looked at the beast-like spirit pensively. His eyes were soft and clear, and he radiated with the confidence and ease the others all seemed to lack. Vaellor's brow furrowed further. "And of passion," the man continued, shifting his weight against the polished stick propping up his frail form. *This man...the only one unafraid to speak.* He watched the small man in awe. "....and of so much more," he finished. When he did, the others looked at him, confusion lining their foreheads. Then many of them looked up at the mysterious being taller than their houses, studying his muscles the size of boulders and the frizzy hair dropping past his shoulders.

Finally, another one of them spoke, but this time it was directed at the frail figure still staring at Vaellor. "What are you talking about, Nicholas?" a woman asked, keeping her eyes locked on the elder.

Nicholas' stare remained fixed on the being—this spirit with such a physical form you'd never know he wasn't mortal, if he wasn't so enormous. He cleared his throat and shifted his gaze to the woman. "It is a long story," he began, creeping towards her with his walking stick, "But it's a tale that must be told." He stopped and smiled, turning his gaze to the sky wistfully, "Oh...I must have been about seventeen. I learned of books. Small packages that held stories bound between covers, inked within pages. I'd never heard of such a thing as these before. Even now, they are scarce, and many of you may have never seen one...but I got to. I was taught letters, and that there were people who recorded stories and legends on these things. They were hard to decipher, as every letter was a bit different to every writer, but I learned of stories that were told by elders at the beginning of everything—a time not much older than my father's father." His eyes darted back to Vaellor. "And I think I learned about you."

There were a few whispers and gasped, but Nicholas just stared at the being with thoughtful eyes. “I learned that there were a few books created that all said similar things. That there were parts of the world we didn’t understand. Things called ‘elements’ and things like that. I learned that one day—as the legend had it—color would be added to the world. I don’t mean blue or green, or anything like that, as you all know we have those already. I mean *true* color, given to us by beings from off these mortal grounds. They would bring unseen gifts we hadn’t yet had the privileges of receiving. I learned that the world wasn’t where it was supposed to be yet—that more life would be given to it. I never understood these things—or even really learned that they were more than just folktales—until today.”

“But how did you know these were true?” a man with light hair asked.

“And how did you know it was this being?” the first woman asked.

The corner of Nicholas’ mouth turned up in a smile. “Well...I didn’t know they were true. I was just fascinated by them. And...as you all well know...I am at the end of my life. I was at peace knowing I’d lived a good life—and I *did* have a good life. I just didn’t know how bright life could be.”

“What are you talking about?” a teenage boy in the crowd asked impatiently, his mother nudging him with a hush.

The man just smiled. “Well, I never knew these stories I was so fascinated with as a youth were true. And I had made my peace with the fact that I would never know. But today...I woke with a start. Something flooded through me—something came alive. Something inside me awoke. It was as if I’d lived my life in black, white, and grays, and I was seeing color for the first time. Feeling warmth and light for the first time. My heart soared, and my body felt better than it ever had in my entire life. It was just a flicker of a moment, but I still feel it now, and it may keep me alive just a little while longer.”

There was silence all around them, other than the rustling of leaves in the wind-blown trees. “But what does all of this mean?” one of the villagers asked.

“There has been an awakening in the Earth. Something has always been missing—quite a lot, actually, from what I’ve gathered today,” he looked over at Vaellor once more and continued, “And I believe there is still so much more I don’t know anything about. I just know that you, sir, are one of those beings, and there is a lot we don’t know that you need to teach us.” More gasps than ever

before filled the crowd, and whispers amongst the villagers grew louder and louder like a growing fire until everyone was loudly talking to the others.

Nicholas didn't see any reason to quiet the crowd. He watched their widened eyes and rapid speech, which pooled out of them like water spilling from a jug, as they all came to terms with what all of this meant. He knew it was a lot to take in, and he wasn't sure of all of it himself—he didn't know what was truth and what was speculation or folly. He didn't know how much to believe and what to throw out from his mind. He wasn't sure how anyone learned of these things to begin with, other than maybe in dreams. None of that really mattered, though, for as of now, they had much to learn, and Nicholas wanted to be there at the start before he passed on to whatever came next for mortal beings such as himself.

Everyone in the village was experiencing a different reaction from all of this new information, and Nicholas was the only one to be even a little calm about it all—even Vaellor's stomach churned and eyes darted between each person as the magnitude of his mission finally settled upon him. His large stature was easy to see, so his expressions were consequently easy to read. He knew of passions and feelings beyond any mortal comprehension, but he didn't know how to settle this crowd. He didn't know how to teach these people how to use what they felt inside to create beauty—beauty they never knew they could create. He had so much knowledge and power with no sense of how to teach it.

Somehow, the old man could tell he needed to intervene. He wobbled over to the large immortal man and placed a hand on his large leg. The moment he did, the crowd went still. Some people wouldn't even utter a breath. Nicholas smiled softly once more and then looked from Vaellor to the people gathered before him. "He will teach us great things, and I am lucky enough to be alive to help us all begin."

It took more than a few days to start this grand task. They were about to embark on a journey like the world had never seen before, but they didn't have the knowledge to fully grasp it. At first, Nicholas worked on bridging the gap between the villagers' way of life and the way Vaellor wanted to start. He wanted to get right to it—to show the humans what they'd been missing and what they were capable of. The strengths, power, beauty, and passions, and so much more. He wanted to show the person in the crowd with the rhythmic movements that she could use what she so evidently loved to put a story into dance with no need for words. He wanted to show the power love had to the man so guarded he would barely look at the satin-haired woman he could never

resist glimpsing at more than ten times per day.

As the days wore on, he also wanted to teach how you could build up strength and muscle to lift things they'd never known were possible. He wanted to show them how to protect themselves and use the fire and passions in their hearts to protect their loved ones and their people. There was so much chaos, and he so desperately wanted to teach them how to utilize all these powers inside of them. He just couldn't get through to them without terrifying each and every one of them.

This is where Nicholas stepped in. Over the course of a few days, and then weeks, he taught the people everything he learned from the stories from long ago and how Vaellor would teach them things that would make life worth living in even the darkest of times. He would teach them to utilize these phenomenal gifts that they were still lacking understanding of. Ultimately, the elderly man knew Vaellor would have to take over from there, which is where a lot of his focus lay with the being.

Essentially, he taught Vaellor how to be human. He taught him that the people of the village would be scared if he went about things a certain way. He taught him that he had to be softer than his first reactions tended to be. He needed to show the people he wasn't something—*someone*—to be afraid of. If they were afraid, they might be too paralyzed to partake in the lessons (or be unable to process them if they did work up the courage to show up and try).

It was an arduous process, but soon, everything aligned. The people were ready to listen without fear, and Vaellor learned how to respect their fears and show them how to understand it. As his life on Earth proceeded, the overwhelming emotions that first consumed him settled in his being in a way he could tolerate. It only took him a matter of days to process everything and learn what he needed to, but it took the rest of the time to learn how to put the humans at ease and be receptive.

Slowly, even Vaellor's appearance softened. Although he was still bulky and strong, his newly eased nature made him less frightening--his face less strained, his shoulders less tense, and his posture not so wild and chaotic. He didn't intimidate the others anymore, which only aided him in his endeavours. Over the first few weeks, he started truly enjoying working with the humans, teaching them how to use the music in them to create stories into songs, poems, and dances; how to utilize their physical strengths and passions; and how they could use their various emotions and feelings to create beauty in a variety of ways. The lessons continued, and he gradually taught them more and more skills and ideas. As he did, the gap between them as friends disappeared.

Vaellor enjoyed this new life with the humans. At first, he struggled with the thought of living among these strange mortal beings, but the urge to help them soon took over. He saw their potential when he came into the world, and he saw what he could give them--what he could show and teach them. He learned that they weren't just creatures that were small and afraid. They had such spark inside of them. Such life. Passion seemed to flow right through them without them even realizing it. He helped them understand the arts, and he joined in with them when they asked to sing songs by the fire each night.

He loved learning more and more about them, and he loved to watch them pick up what he learned. With each new feat they accomplished, his motivational fire was lit even brighter. One day, Vaellor raced around the forest with some of the adults in the village. He was teaching them skills of evasion and stealth. He taught them how to run and hide from enemies, and how to keep safe and be quick. But he was having trouble showing them the final piece of what they needed to know. He couldn't think of how to show them the final, key piece in what they were missing. Until something stopped him dead in his tracks.

While the villagers continued running through the trees around him, Vaellor couldn't turn away. It was almost like looking into a mirror, but the reflection didn't show his face. It was more of a feeling. An emotional connection that gave him the missing piece. A kindred connection with a creature in the forest. He walked closer to it, and as he did, he realized that it was a stag, strong and bold, standing its guard just a few feet away. It wasn't scared of them. It faced its fears head-on, despite any odds. This is what he needed to teach them. This was the missing piece. Not only did they need to learn to evade their enemies and stay hidden when attacked, they needed to learn to stand their ground and be strong and brave. No matter what.

A few months went by before Vaellor was interrupted during one of his archery lessons by a small girl running over to him with arms waving in the air. He stopped his lesson and waited for her to tell them what was going on. The girl's curled locks drooped down her face as she caught her breath. "It's Nicholas," she said, panting, "Come quick." Vaellor's heart sunk into his stomach. He immediately dropped his bow and arrow and bolted to the man's home, his mind feverish the entire way there.

Thought after thought raced through his mind, but in the end, the worry he couldn't shake was that he'd be too late to see his good friend one last time. Then finally, he saw it. Nicholas' small little home, tucked quietly between trees. The home the old man brought him on his first day of

life on Earth.

Upon entering the hut, he saw the withered man frailer than ever. His heart sunk into his stomach and tears burned his eyes. This man was his friend. He was unafraid when faced with his initial frenzied state. He taught him how to assimilate to Earth without destroying the mission he was destined to perform. Without Nicholas, Vaellor wasn't sure if he'd ever been able to understand humans well enough to teach them all he knew. At the very least, it would have taken Vaellor years to get to the point he was at now in his understanding of humans. They were more than children who needed guidance—they were friends who accepted him, despite their differences.

He crept to the man's bedside and knelt down to look into his eyes. Nicholas' eyes—once so clear—were foggy and unable to open all the way, but he saw his friend and gave a hint of that same smile he gave him on Day One.

"My friend," he whispered, too weak and tired to move more than a hand. "I'm glad I got to see you one last time."

Emotion welled within Vaellor, spiking through his body like a scattered bout of electric shocks. A lump formed in his throat and it took all the composition he had in him to not let out a sob. They looked at each other with silent understanding until Nicholas spoke up again, voice still small.

"You can do great things for this people," he said, patting Vaellor's large hands with his shriveled ones, "I'm just sorry I won't be around to see it."

A tear rolled its way down Vaellor's cheek as he replied, "Thank you for letting me in."

The man smiled. "Of course. Thank you for coming."

With that, the man's eyes dulled and his spirit moved on to a place Vaellor knew he could visit him again—just not in this mortal world.

He cast his eyes down at the man's small hands and choked back tears. When he first arrived in this village, he hadn't fully grasped how such powerful emotions, power, and strength could ever be used for bad. He felt all the potential powers and emotions of humans as he came into being, and he saw flashes of vibrant images of greatness, all at the hands of humans with the abilities he would help them hone. He loved the way humans could be wild and free and that they were stronger than he would have thought. However, this understanding was faulty and problematic,

and it didn't match with the behaviors of the humans in the village when he first made contact with them.

Nicholas was the one who helped him understand. He helped him understand the follies of mankind and the way humans worked on a regular basis. From that, he was able to understand how to properly teach them how to use these abilities. He would teach them about them with some caution, but ultimately it would be up to these faulty mortals to choose what to do with them. Through Nicholas' reassurance, Vaellor knew it would be okay—that all he had to worry about was teaching men and women what lied within them and how to use it. Then they would have to do the rest.

As humans made more sense to the immortal man, he began to sympathize with their struggles. However, it wasn't until Nicholas' passing that he was able to truly *empathize* with them. Such strong emotions ploughed through him, and even though he understood all of it and had such great power and insight—far greater than any human—it was still difficult for him to reconcile loss. To grieve without a part of him shutting down in some way. This was the final lesson Nicholas taught him.

As he walked back into the village that day, Vaellor readied himself to tell his companions of their friend's passing. Out of all the lessons he'd taught them so far, this would be the first time he'd share in their struggle. His appearance had become more human throughout the entire process, but now he was becoming more human on the inside too.

There was still so much to teach them, but on that day, he let himself just be their friend.

He'd have the rest of his existence to teach mankind their strengths. He could take one day off.

The House of Starcamp

The Legend of Starcamp

Excerpt taken from Chapter 3 in The Three Houses by Elise Nelson.

When the three Spirits of Terra spawned across the Earth, something inside the planet came alive. Each one of them brought with them powers beyond mortal comprehension, including the power to educate humanity on how to utilize these abilities. The spirit who possessed the most intellectual powers was Cato, the spirit who would one day be known as the creator of Starcamp.

It was an ordinary day when Cato felt his existence materialize and saw himself turn into a humanoid form. Although his two spiritual counterparts had overwhelming bouts of emotion surging through them, Cato's influx of information was just as powerful. His immortal brain swelled as every ounce of knowledge about the Earth, its solar system, and the anomalies of its existence raced through his mind. The surge was a heavy burden that left him aching at the temples. Although he was immortal, he felt the way a mortal would if they had been stranded without food for over 24 hours.

With his powers of unfathomable intellect came the immediate perception of how things generally worked on Earth, both in the ecosystem and within mortal civilizations. He scanned his surroundings and noticed he was in a place of great warmth, but not in a place that would be wanting for food. On the contrary. This place was lush with long landscapes of grassy fields and long, billowy trees that sprouted from the soil like the hairy trunk of an animal. The temperature was undeniably hot, but he could tell that it wasn't this hot all year round; soon, it would be warm and much more tolerable for the humans living there. While the sun burned down heavily from the sky, there was a breeze that hung sweetly in the air, relaxing in the nostrils. It gave the land a more pleasant feel, and he was sure the humans appreciated this.

The sun soaked into Cato's dark hair, reminding the immortal being to find a place in the shade. However illogical it seemed, he believed water could help relieve the throbbing in his head. It didn't take long for him to find where he needed to go. He followed the signs of life left evident in the land around him and soon reached a place with large structures that immediately displayed great signs of accomplishment. *These humans don't have many buildings like this on their Earth at the moment...these must have taken...approximately 10.45 years each.*

He fixed his gaze on the largest building, a v-shaped crease appearing where his eyebrows scrunched together in thought.

He walked toward the structure, all the while analyzing each and every detail that would give him the necessary information it took to provide him with a good theory. When he reached the landmark, he realized it was about what he expected—it was a large gathering place for the townspeople to seek refuge in, likely on hot days such as this.

This is when he knew he needed a plan. He couldn't just march in and ask for water. These people have likely worked together for decades to bring this place to a flourishing state. There were very few people in the town, from what Cato could see, so an outsider coming in would either be a very good thing or a very bad thing.

After searching every possible outcome in his mind, Cato realized it was pointless to assume and just opened the front door. Once inside, he was entirely underwhelmed. The walls were a dull gray and blank everywhere other than around the rounded door frame that led into a large room where echoes of children's laughter and loud chatter could be heard from the entryway. He peered at the colored markings around the doorframe and studied the patterns carefully drawn in purple and blue. The vibrant colors lit up the entry to the large gymnasium like a berry-filled vine. They caught the eye and gave a certain element of warmth to the otherwise bland walls, like an invitation to let them know this isn't somewhere to be feared. The curved lines weren't letters or numbers, and they didn't look to be of anything that would tell this village's history. He gathered that these patterns held some kind of meaning for their village nonetheless—symbols that meant togetherness, whether that was the direct translation or not.

He took his eyes off the art to enter into the large gathering hall. As soon as he did, one by one voices hush to nothing like a silencing wave. There were 84 people in attendance, fifty of which were children. The people looked Cato up and down, and it was clear they hadn't had an outsider in quite some time. His appearance was utterly human, so they wouldn't have suspected he was anything more than that, but he was an outsider, nonetheless.

After another excruciating moment of silence, he asked, "Could I please have some water?"

One of the villagers—a man with a crooked nose and short legs—rushed to the far-right corner of the room. Cato's eyes narrowed. *Why do they seem afraid?*

"I mean you no harm," he said as he approached. The man handed him a wooden cup of water. He took it thirstily and drank the whole thing in one go. The headache remained, but it was now greatly reduced. He figured the rest would go in time, after the knowledge settled in his newly shaped mind.

"Please have a seat," one of the other men in the village said, gesturing toward the dirt below. The being nodded and took a seat.

Recognizing social cues from his newfound knowledge, Cato asked, "Would you care to tell me about your town? I am new here and would love to know." He folded his skinny legs and crossed his arms as he waited for someone to speak.

"Well..." a woman with a long black braid and sun-kissed skin started, "All of us have lived here our entire lives. We call our town Carlanea, after the founder of the village. She is the one who also wanted to build stronger structures to withstand a lot of the storms we get here. Her idea has saved all of us in many ways."

"We are very proud," the man next to her said, nodding in agreement.

Cato nodded too and watched as the others shifted awkwardly and silently throughout the room. He smiled. "Well, don't let me get in your way of having a good day today. Please continue your merriment. I would like to talk with the leader of this village, though."

A burly man with a dark complexion and thick curly hair stood up. "That would be me. Please meet me out in the hall." He did as the man asked. He walked back into the entryway and turned around to greet the man.

"Hello. I am Cato, and I would love to set up a research station here."

The two men were the same height, so Cato could see every shade of brown flecked within the man's eyes as he spoke. "I don't really follow. A...research station?"

Cato nodded. "Precisely, yes. You see, there are a lot of things I need to teach hu—I, uh, I mean...there are a lot of things I need to teach the people I meet. I can explain all of that another time, if you are willing to put me up in your town."

The man lifted a bushy eyebrow. "Why would we give you a free place to live? We all work so hard

for what we have here. We don't need an outsider coming in and asking to get special treatment. We're just fine." He turned to leave when Cato put a hand on the man's shoulder.

"Please allow me to explain," Cato said. The man brushed the being's hand from off his shoulder and grumbled. "I am not from here, but I possess a great deal of information that I believe you would find useful." Cato knew perfectly well that he would lose all credibility if he tried to explain who and what he truly was, so he figured he could let that information come out on its own naturally, whenever that time may come.

"Useful how?" the man asked, unconvinced but still intrigued.

"I can teach you a writing system that will combine your village with others in the area, and I can teach you valuable information about the weather and environment—things that will help you better understand the storms here, such as the ones that have been fatal for you and your people. I can also teach you about medicine and education. I can—"

The man held up his hands, his brow heavy but his face blank. "Whoa. Well, I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know if you're telling me the truth about all this or not, but I'll tell you what: if you are able to help us somehow, please do. I'll give you one week. You can stay here in this building. The residents here return home at suppertime, when the sun is setting and the air cools. If you can't teach us anything we don't absolutely need to know, you have to leave."

Cato nodded. "Agreed. Thank you. Your name, sir?" He held out his hand for the man to shake.

"Matthew," he said, taking Cato's hand. "And I hope you don't like to eat too much. Although...from the look of you, I wouldn't say you eat much."

Cato smiled. "Don't worry. I don't really eat at all."

**

The next day, Cato set up an area in the building to teach his first lesson. Before the humans woke up, he scoured the nearby rocks for ones to use for chalk. When he found the ones he was looking for, he headed back to town and started writing simple markings on the wall for them to see. When the sun was up, the villagers arrived one family at a time. They each wore the same look of confusion as they walked into the room.

When about half the villagers arrived, one of them asked, "Why are you drawing on our wall?"

"I am not drawing," he said, his hand continuing to busily etch into the wall, "I am ready to teach you basic arithmetic, and then symbols for writing. This is the first step in teaching you the valuable lessons that will help your civilizations here on Earth thrive."

His hand stopped for half a second when he realized how very un-mortal he sounded just then, but then he kept writing at the same pace until he was done writing everything he needed to. "And don't worry: this washes right off."

"I don't think we're—"

"Matthew! Good, you're here. Look at what this man is doing! Are you going to let him do this?"

"He's ruining our walls—"

"He—"

"Enough!" Matthew said, his voice like thunder. Cato dropped his hand and turned to the town leader. "This man is named Cato. He will be living with us for one week. He has vowed to teach us valuable information that will help us against the storms, and other things. He will be sleeping in this building each night, and he claims to not need any food. Give him a chance. Try your best at listening and learning. If his teachings prove invaluable by the end of the week, he will be gone." He gestured to Cato. "Please begin teaching."

Cato wanted to smile but knew the man didn't care too much about the immortal man's wellbeing. He just wanted to keep up his end of the bargain and see if Cato actually knew what he was talking about.

He nodded. "Okay, well, today I am going to teach you about some basics that will help you better understand some other concepts."

"How can you help us against our storms?" A short, overweight man called out from the crowd. Cato let out a breath and turned to face him.

"I can teach you about that tomorrow, if you'd like."

"No. I want to know now," the man said, his arms crossed, and his chest puffed out. This sentiment

was seconded by many voices saying *yeah!* in the crowd. Cato sighed and nodded.

“Well, I can tell you a little about that, too. Maybe we can get to that after lunch. I already prepared this lesson, so let’s start with this. Is that alright?” He waited for the villagers’ input.

Finally, the man with the crossed arms nodded reluctantly, and others did the same. Cato smiled. “Good. Then let’s proceed.”

The days went by. Each one was presented with an assortment of lessons the villagers couldn’t get enough of. They loved learning about the water cycle and everything to do with the weather, and they enjoyed learning the basics of math and letters. They had their own system before, which Cato tried to incorporate into it. This made them excited, and many of them loved that they could now more efficiently create messages to share with one another. Before, they couldn’t make messages longer than a sentence or two, at most, as they didn’t have a specific alphabet or structure set in place. None of them had seen it important enough to do something about because the way they had it seemed efficient enough at the time. None of them ever left the village unless they needed to go into another city for food and trading. This—and other eclectic purposes—was the only time they found they really needed to correspond in this way to begin with. Now, the possibilities seemed endless, and they were hungry for more.

To his immense relief, Cato was given the opportunity to stay in the village for as long as they all saw fit (including what he felt would be best for his own endeavours). So, he continued teaching everything he could almost every day for an entire year. Each subsequent year went about the same, except that they decided upon a five-day education week. On the sixth day, the villagers expected Cato to help with shared physical labors, and on the seventh day they rested and only worked to cook, clean, or help someone in need.

Slowly, the village grew. The people learned how to use their knowledge in a variety of ways, which both grew the desirability of their village and expanded each villager’s horizons. People would move out of town to teach what they’d learned to people all around and learn more about the world. This gave Cato the greatest satisfaction. It was all precisely what he’d hoped.

After a few years, Cato established a couple different houses of education in the town. The leader of the town agreed to give Cato the gathering building as an education center. They were able to build smaller structures next to it for expanded disciplines. Over time, more and more buildings were created for the purpose of education in this town, which soon developed into a city. As more

people joined the community, more people were able to use their skills to help the others in the city and in the towns and cities nearby. The people still used the biggest building to have social gatherings, but it was now officially a school from the hours of 7 am until 5 pm each day.

Over the years, Cato was able to teach others in different disciplines so they could be teachers of their own. They could stay in this town or go to another to teach in their respective fields and areas of interest. Decades passed by, and the city was suddenly a huge metropolis for education. The humans had also caught on to Cato being a being of immortal design, as he never aged, but by that point he had already shown the evidence of who he truly was, and they knew and trusted him. Luckily, he never had to have any awkwardly failed attempts at explaining he wasn't human. He just let himself be an open book, and they trusted the knowledge they found in his pages.

Tales of him reached far across the land, and even across the Earth. People would come from all over to be taught under his tutelage. It had been nearly a thousand years since entering this city when he received a special knock at his office door.

"Come in," he called out, turning the page of a sand-yellow book in his hands. A young woman stepped forward. He knew upon looking at her that she was about 24 years old. Her eyes were a deep-sea blue and her long hair, cascading in ripples down her back, were as sandy as the pages in his book.

"Hello," she said, wringing her hands nervously. "May I...Um...are you busy?"

Cato closed his book and leaned forward in his seat, his elbows balanced against the smooth wooden desk some of his former students created for him as a "thank you" present years before. He shook his head with a smile. "Not at all. Please take a seat."

The woman did as he asked and plopped down on the seat across from him. Her hands kept wringing in her lap as she silently watched him looking back at her. He opened his mouth to break the silence when she did it for him, "My name is Mary, and I just want to say 'thank you'. Because of you, everything in my life came together. Because of you, I can be happy."

One of Cato's eyebrows rose. "Oh. I'm...I'm glad." His advanced intellect always gave him the responses needed in every given situation. This was the first time he couldn't find the words to say.

She nodded nervously and continued, "You see, my brother was dying a few years ago. We didn't know what to do. My brother and I were sixteen at the time, and since we were the eldest and my

brother needed our mother, we decided we'd go out and find a way to save him." Water droplets began to form on the windowpane and humidity thickened the air in the office. Cato just watched in awe as the girl continued. "My father died when my brother was a baby, so my brother, Richard, and I have been taking care of our family ever since. When my brother was eight, he got very sick and we didn't know what to do. He was always in and out of fevers, and it was hard for him to breathe. Richard and I had heard rumors of you—and another—beings that were more than human. People who could help us. So, we decided to split up to gather as much information as possible—to find anything that could save William. Richard went to see you, and I went to a land in the mountains. To see a woman named Lumine."

The name of his sister sent a shiver down Cato's spine. He hadn't seen his spirit brother and sister since arriving on this planet. Yet, he knew her by name. And he'd never seen her with his own eyes.

The girl's hands stopped wringing. She looked deep into Cato's eyes and said. "I found so many answers in healing, and so did he. We wrote down as much as we could and met back at our family home six months later. I was terrified the entire time that William was going to die at any moment. Luckily, my mother always raised us to read and write, so we were able to correspond with her. It was hard, though, as the letters took months to get to us. I only ever got two letters from my mother and one from Richard—one that said 'Coming home'." She looked out the window and watched the rain begin to fall. "So, I left. I studied all the way home and got there three weeks later, by horse and wagon. Richard and I conversed and agreed on what we thought my brother needed. I taught him the remedies and techniques I'd learned in Lumine's school of health and wellness, and he taught me everything he learned here that matched with what I learned. Our notes overlapped, but we each also brought necessary information to the table that the other didn't have. Together, we were able to save my brother. And it was all because of you and Lumine."

Tears formed in her eyes, and it took a minute for Cato to realize tears had formed in his eyes as well.

"So, thank you again," she said, getting to her feet. "Thank you for saving our family."

Cato talked with the young woman for another hour or so before she left with a man who appeared to be her husband. The two kissed and walked down the street and out of view.

Time ticked by in his office, but the spirit being of intellect couldn't get this girl's visit off his mind. *It was all because of you and Lumine* he heard her say in his mind, over and over again.

The clock on his wall slowly ticked by, but he didn't pay any mind to it. His thoughts were elsewhere. The only thing that distracted him were the subtle hoots of an owl right outside the window. That's when he realized just how much time had passed.

Without him even realizing it, the sun had set and he'd made his decision.

He looked back out the window and stared with narrowed eyes at the silhouette of the owl against the light of the moon. Its image looked like a picture inside of a light source, and something about the creature made him feel at ease. For the first time in a long time, he truly felt at peace.

The next day, Cato informed his apprentice that he would be leaving and that he could take over all his classes and be in charge of the school in his absence if he'd like. If not, he could appoint the next teacher he deemed fit for the job. His apprentice nodded in excitement and said, "I won't let you down, sir!" and uncharacteristically gave the immortal man a hug. Cato laughed and gave him a pat on the back.

After he packed a bag with what he thought necessary for his travels, a smile broke across the immortal man's face as he looked toward the mountains. "I'm ready to meet you, Lumine," he said to himself as he stepped into the street. "I think there are some great things we can teach each other, and I'm ready to learn."