

☆ "Star-Shaped Bones" ☆

It was born from a star. As an energetic, explosively dangerous little creature, it loved to twirl amongst the debris and roll around in the light of a neighboring sun. Every day was a chance to go further, always an opportunity to see how bright it could burn and how speedily it chased after the meteor friends that came by to visit. It played a little too roughly one day and was knocked out of orbit, thrown towards the nearest planet. As it fell with incredible speeds, the tips of its fingers and nose caught fire, and it giggled at the familiar feeling of adrenaline. It crashed through a tall tree and tumbled down a hill, leaving small trails of foot-wide burns.

The fallen star had caught the attention of a thirty-year-old couple walking nearby. They followed the light and were surprised to see it radiate out of the small humanoid creature. It looked so helpless yet full of wonder as it scanned their faces. They picked it up carefully, held it close, and even though it did singe their skin a bit, they did not hesitate to take it in as their own. To cool it down, they laid a sheet of metal in their bathtub and covered the feisty creature with freezing water, rubbing and smoothing out the thing's tantrumed wails and squiggly nature, until its glow was reduced to chunks of chewy yellow light in its arms, legs, and neck.

They baptized it under the name of Sia.

Sia's childhood was like that of any regular human. It was taken to the town's small playground to waddle and swing around, and was fascinated by the little packets of chewy milk candy in the corner's snack shop. And it, too, was taken to school every day in a thick little button-up raincoat and opaque leggings that were never to be folded back or taken off, not even in the summer.

When Sia got too excited one day while playing with its friends and its joyful glow drew out the smell of burning fabric, its parents quickly intervened and forbid it from showing its condition to anyone else. And from then on, every day it was to come home immediately, sit down on the dining table, and dip its hands in freezing water. They called this routine of suppressing the fire "Normal Class". But Sia would always end up slipping away to its bedroom and rub its hands under a small desk lamp, guiltily basking in its kind warmth.

And when the children in school began to notice the strangeness in Sia's attire and routine breaks during class, its parents expanded the Normal Class into the weekends. They would drive to a wide concrete building, musty with its odd smell of worn out metal, filled with long rows of crickety benches and high arched windows that let in a pale squiggle of light. The building was often packed so full that the family would have to squeeze in one of the back rows, apologizing to the nearby strangers that stared at them with empty eyes, while a deep voice at the front droned on. Sia never understood how the parents could become so transfixed with the monotone sound. Its gaze would always end up backwards, to the ring of light around

the misfitted door. As the evening progressed, its legs would feel like sticks of frost, and the hand on Sia's shoulder would grow heavier.

Sia wondered how its peers had so much energy to play outside after their own Normal Classes. But it didn't ask, because it didn't want to look stupid. It reckoned that it had something to do with the "wrong behavior" that the adults loved to talk about.

Something along those words was repeated that day, as Sia's family filed into the old building again, but this time did not head towards the benches. Sia's mother tugged at its hand, and its eyes widened as they passed through the very center of the hall, heading directly to the front. Whispers of "will be corrected" and "finally fixed" rolled around. A hundred eyes stuck to Sia, and as they walked it seemed as if the ground was sloped down and the walls curved inwards, distorting the already frail light of the windows. Sia began to shake, felt its arms cramping up and stinging. They began to swell and heat, and in a panic Sia remembered its mothers words earlier that day:

"Sia, sweetie, today if...it... happens, I want you to take a deep breath for me and think of anything cold..."

The words forced a torrent of frost into its buzzing brain. The memory of ice flashed back: a frigid splash on its face...

"Take a deep breath for me... "

The thought slipped beneath its clothing and spread to its arms and chest and legs, tiny silver worms biting and infesting...

"A deep breath..."

It closed its eyes, eyelashes drooped with geledity...

The tug of the mother's hand stopped. The voices around the room blurred and lowered all of a sudden. The room was spinning, and a searing pain behind Sia's eyes threatened. It blinked hard many times, pushing back and willing the pain not to be there, to shut up, to listen for once, to do as it's told. But the more it pushed and pressured, the more it released, and the floods were crawling all over and it stood there frozen, not knowing what to do...

Take a deep breath...

...and trust yourself...

A flash of light took hold of it suddenly, a familiar throbbing beam that tasted of smoldering dust. A golden light danced around Sia, placing little stars all around its body, which embraced it and washed away the worms. As the stars melted into Sia's skin, it giggled at the tingling sensation. Whatever this feeling was, Sia liked it.

It opened its eyes and let its laughter glow.