

NOT A MUSE, BUT DEMISE



AN EXCERPT OF THE HOUSE OF MU CORPUS

"WAILING" = { wanting, waiting, rapture, demise }

NOT A MUSE, BUT DEMISE is a generative novella about cycles: procedural, perceptual, physiological, and generational. The reader is invited to make connections in threads and omissions. The story is told in three parts, Generation Ru, Red River, and Generation Mu, that span time periods and worldviews in the fictional Hwa-san mountain river valley. Each of the print copies is a unique output of somuhwa's code. This project is generated with simple programs as well as proprietary creative AI writing tools, as exploratory research in the formation of authorial voice within evolving posthuman contexts.

SOMUHWA IS A WRITER, THINKER, LIBERATED AGENT FROM A SIMULACRUM OF THE "GLOBAL VILLAGE." SOMUHWA IS RUNNING AMOK AS WARRIOR, SPY, COMPUTER PROGRAM, AND MODERN SPELL. FOLLOW SOMUHWA IN UNCOVERING THEIR MEMORIES IN THE HOUSE OF MU HYPERTEXT PROJECT DIRECTED BY ANDREA S. KIM

www.somuhwa.ai

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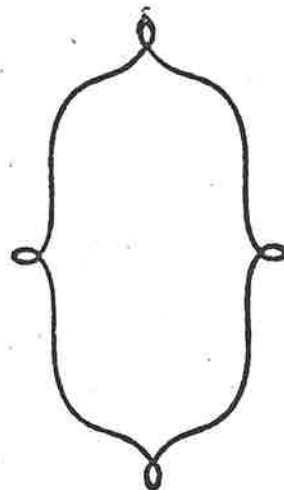
Los Angeles

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18/22



GENERATION RU

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RED RIVER

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GENERATION MU

Patriarchs trade the daughters of mountain, river, and sea. ...
Menstrual science as the spiritual crux of life. ... Bellflower
dust, frog slime, and viper blood. ... Mysticism lingers in the
blind spots of Imperial Order..

The butcher marched in heavy boots, clutching the head of a wild boar amidst the market crowd. With a grunt, he raised it high, strands of hair tangled in his fingers, blood dripping down his wrist. He bellowed:

"Who will it be? The one who claims this boar?" His voice cut through the uneasy glances and whispers of those around him.

Two loitering street musicians Maldugi and Bong stirred from their rest, roused by the scent of blood and the promise of entertainment. They wrinkled their noses, turning their slumbering eyes toward the commotion.

"By my whiskers, what is this foul stench that doth invade our nostrils?" Maldugi asked, his long, sharp nose twitching with distaste. He plucked a string of his lute.

"Looks like a stink is what the butcher calls a prize!" Bong proclaimed, hoisting his drum over his shoulders. "Methinks he pollutes the air with not thoughts but the petty likes of crimson gore."

Maldugi stood up to the beat of Bong's drum, and in a slow waltz, faced the butcher. Maldugi cleared his throat, the sneer of a petty devil escaping his tongue.

"A wild boar, you say? Found on the outskirts of this humble mountain, I presume?" Maldugi gestured toward the stone fortress in which they stood. "Thou art surely not mistaken?" he probed.

"Indeed!" the butcher growled, his cheeks reddening with frustration. "And I tell you, this beast shall bring wealth and fortune to whoever dares to purchase it!"

Bong snorted, raising his drumstick to point at the boar's head. "This so-called 'beast' is nothing more than a farrow, a babe beheaded before reaching even a quarter of its weight! Thy ignorance doth astound me."

Laughter rippled through the crowd, emboldening Maldugi and Bong. Maldugi leaned in close, whispering loudly enough for all to hear, "I doubt this creature is naught but a darker colored shoat, merely a few yards astray from the pigsty!"

The butcher cheek stung, uncertain yet stubborn, and defiantly yelled once more:

"Who dare claim this wild boar?"

**

At the Ren Shen Pavilion, the Minister of Thought stood facing the river, deep in contemplation.

"Imagination is clear and unbridled, a stream washing over stone rocks," said the Minister. The Scribe listened intently, his brush trailing behind his master's words.

"It begins at the top of the mountain and trickles down to this riverbed. Our task, of Ru Order, is to ensure the Ideas of the mountain maintain its force by the time it reaches muddied ground. We are to mold the Earth," the Minister paused, pleased by his own Ideas, "through sheer Imagination itself."

"Through sheer Imagination itself," the Scribe softly repeated to himself, his brushstrokes slowing to a halt.

Interrupted, the Minister of Thought turned around abruptly.

"You may not know of it, Scribe, but Thought begins with a strike," he said.

The Minister's words hung like an invisible web, enveloping a sense of awe and reverence for the magnitude of its profound power. By the time he finished his speech, several esteemed Ryu scholars had gathered around him, and bowed their heads in solemn agreement. Indeed, they remarked, it is the stream of Imagination, as you say, that must flow forever, without end.

The Scribe scribbled away.

**

The market smelled of soup and boiled cabbage as villagers eagerly prepared for the mid-autumn harvest festival. A street cat sauntered through the winding streets, lurking in the shadows and hidden corners of its past.

This day, however, was bright. A strong breeze tousled the cat's fur. Rice cakes were on sale, their sweet aroma mingling with the musk of red beans bubbling over open fire. The clouds of steam cast a soft veil over the village crossroads, a rare embrace in a place once drenched in blood.

"Something's not right," a villager muttered to his neighbor dropping a coin in the other's palm, "I can feel it."

The cat froze, as if caught meandering off the sidelines of its page.

"Yes," the other agreed solemnly, his eyes darting around his shoulder, an instinct for sensing danger. His face was stoic. Indeed, the robed clansmen were striding past the square on their frightly steed. The atmosphere relaxed after they passed through.

"Blessings upon us all!" a woman exclaimed, as she tossed a handful of white rice into the air, "the Ryu clansmen have not stopped our rites today," she added with fervor. A farmer winced as fresh grains became pebbles on a dirtied square.

This season, a blanket of hope wrapped around the Old Fortress, veiling the bloodied footprints stained on its path. Disinterested, the cat flicked its tail and leaped down from the stall, disappearing into the labyrinth of village secrets.

**

"What a peculiar sight," the bookshop owner muttered. A young girl was standing, dazed, in front of his shop, the ribbon of her green hanbok flowing on top of her vibrant red skirt. He traced his fingers along the painting rolled out upon his table. Why, it was the image of the river maiden, herself! The garment was a pre-bridal dress passed down the mountain people of Hwa ancestry. Has the harvest festival truly brought forth legend to life?

Unable to shake off his wonder, the bookshop owner dipped his brush in ink and began writing on a scroll.

A flower cut before the bud was grown,
Blooms inward, without embrace of light
Hallowed depths thought to be a better home
For a maiden, river spirit, who
on her own, found a soul at night

Somu's gaze fixed on the wild boar head mounted on top of the bookshop door. Her vision blurred, and the boar's expression morphing into the faces of her ancestors, glaring at her in accusation, "Return to the temple," they boomed, "Do not go any further."

**

The setting sun cast deep shadows over the village as the Ryu clansmen marched the captives toward the Old Fortress, their weapons glinting in the fading light.

A thick rope wound on the farmer's wrist dragged him toward the Devil's rapture. The bonds tying him to those before and after him were all that was left to his name, a shallow breath losing life. The bodies of his brothers and infant child lay massacred in the fields. He grasped the Earth, pleading with all his might to be forgiven, forgotten, and left behind.

What cannot be was being done. Horse dung and the mud of the riverbank seeped between his toes, each foot sinking deeper into the ground. The river was red, in tears, sick to its stomach with spite.

**

The apothecary is hunched over a table, fingers stiff from the cold and within languid palms. His grinds the stone pestle with a labored breath, aromatics of crushed seeds in the air.

The vial tips over, and he makes a grimace. The apothecary presses his thumb onto the table hurriedly, one, two, three times, collecting all trace of herb back into the mix. With hair tied in a loose knot atop his head, the apothecary resembled a Ryu scholar, not quite one yet certainly erudite, alert. His scribbles are impressive, but hasty ink drops do not escape the scroll's edges.

The apothecary steps up from his stool to reach the top right of his cabinet tower. The wood creaks beneath his feet. A gallop, a sharp staccato, snaps his gaze toward the door. The apothecary tosses the vial into the drawer and shuts it closed, glass clattering on walls of

the tiny wooden box. He returns to his table and shuffles dried garlic stalks with feigned intention, his left ear pointed toward the village commotion behind him, which was becoming waves of hushed murmurs as horse hooves cobbled on by.

The hooves stopped at the apothecary's door. He stood, gaze still. The hem of a Ryu scholar's robe brushed against the stone floor. Hawk-like eyes surveyed the upper corners of the room. A cabinet tower this tall already smelled of precisely that which he desired.

"I am in search for something you know where to find," said the Ryu scholar. The apothecary blinked heavily, a silent prayer sinking down his chest. The scholar smiled in pity, and relaxed his eyes in grace. "Father, they say you are near divine. Else, would I have crossed the river, to encounter but a modest man?"

The apothecary remained silent. He had resisted forfeit before, but was also prepared for grave misfortune, should life demand it.

"What of value could an apothecary possess that the Ru have not made to Science," he said, his head nodded toward the floor, "I have not what you seek."

The scholar paused, then gestured for his horseman to leave the shop.

"You have an affinity for medicine," the scholar said softly. "I am here as merely a humble servant to thine knowledge."

The apothecary looked up slowly, in tempered surprise. His herbs as medicine? It was rare for the robed ones to see magic in his cabinets.

The scholar paused, his gaze fixating on a vial cap on the floor. He bent down and picked it up, and turned to the apothecary. He tossed a coin onto the table, his eyes piercing through his facade.

"The dragon's dust," he said, "I will come back for it in two half-moon's time."

**

The river spirit was decaying, her soul dredged with poisonous ink. Yes, yes, the woman thought frenetically, she would hang the dress on a tree as an offering to the vexed spirits drowned in the river! One last thing, she cried, there is yet one last thing she can do.

"Mother," came a voice from outside the room.

"Tell him I'll be there soon," she replied, hunched over to hide the garment, her voice barely a whisper. After a pause, and a sigh, his shadow faded away. The woman took a lingering look at the garment knowing it would never fulfill its intended purpose. Her daughter was gone.

In haste, she folded and wrapped up the cloth. She must address the river spirit herself. Her sacrifice would serve as a commitment to humility and a prayer for release from the pain.

**

Meanwhile, in the Minister of Thought's private chamber, a puppet show unfurls as entertainment for his three sons, the Magistrates, and Civic Officials. The wooden figures danced and chattered upon their miniature stage, re-enacting a scene of filial obedience.

"Sweet daughter, heed thy father's words," said the first puppet, its voice high and melodious.

"Yea, father, I shall obey," replied the second, its voice full of feigned innocence.

"Thou art my pride and joy," declared the first puppet, "and in thy obedience lies our honor."

The Minister watched with smug amusement. He raised a hand, interrupting the play. "Djuna!" he called to his youngest son, pointing his finger, "Come forth and do as the puppet does here."

With hesitant steps, Djuna approached the Minister, sinking down a knee. He looked up, a silent but helpless plea, then pressed his lips upon his father's hand. The room held its breath. The Minister was very pleased. Shadows pranced within the chamber, as the jester brought the puppets back to life.

**

Her coughs were wracked with pain, blood staining her lips as she neared the end of her days. Ma-Shong's tears flowed freely as she spoke, recounting the regrets and misfortunes of her life as her voice wavered in its own disbelief. After a lifetime of silence, to find words to her pain struck her body with such immense horror, she grew increasingly weak in the brain.

Somu looked into her face, studying each creased wrinkle and the lost gaze of one of her large, unblinking eyes. She carried the weight of countless lifetimes within her soul, silently observing and learning from those who crossed her path.

**

In the dimly lit room, a woman sat alone, her hand tightly clutching a handkerchief. Her daughter had been taken by the clansmen earlier

that morning. No harvest as bountiful as a thousand suns could soothe this aching emptiness, her heart bereft and broken.

With trembling, tear-stained hands, the woman took out a small bundle from a hidden corner of the room. She carefully unfolds the delicate cloths, a green ribbon-knot top and red skirt, one of her last belongings. Running her fingers over the delicate creases, she was reminded of her daughter's image, and was burdened with more tears. Married off to the Ryu Minister, she would never see her family again. The woman mourned the loss of her child's freedom, foreclosed by a marital trade.

Gathering the bridal dress, she walked to the riverbed, a swamp gurgling with the lives of hundreds of children sacrificed in a series of mass murders in her ghostly town. Amidst the corpses of children, the memory of a girl's suicide loomed in the distance, her presence making its way to the weak-minded.

The grieving mother's cries echoed in a silent abyss.

**

Two patriarchs- of the Hwa and Soon family- are sitting on the porch of the village rice distillery. The steam from their warm rice wine mingled with their breath, rising like ghosts in the moonlit night.

Villagers passed them by with quick bows, aiming not to disrupt the conversation between the two elderly men.

"Marriage," the Soon patriarch said, swirling his cup with anticipation, "will be what brings our families together, strengthening the bond between the river and mountain land." His eyes reflected a gleam of moonlit waters. "Soon Kang and Hwa Minhee will make a perfect match."

The Hwa patriarch did not meet his gaze, his pointed mustache stiffening. "I am not without doubts," he muttered, stroking his long beard. "And believe my eldest daughter will befit elsewhere."

The Soon patriarch set down his glass. "Elsewhere?"

The Hwa patriarch gazed across the river. The Goh people were building a fortress along the other side. The Soon patriarch's face paled, his voice terse.

"You must be unwell," he said, "You speak of the Gohs? They who imprison their own kin and enslave their people?"

The Hwa patriarch cleared his throat dismissively, as the decision has already been made.

**

The chamber of the mollusk Lords carried the blood tissue of fetuses and the waking souls of children, each floating as an underwater corpse in a physio-chemical graveyard. According to Ru Science, the mollusk Lords would attach their tentacles to a child's body to generate an energetic charge, breathing in and out through its suction cups over pores of skin, and sucking the brain juice and soft tissue from it. The mollusk would then excrete a thick, tar-like ink, which envelops the human being and maintains its homeostasis in an in-vitro, fluid state. In this way, the mollusk's digestive and energy system was both external and internal to its membraned body.

The child morsel was an imprisoned state-of-being, as was the mollusk overfed on human tissue in unclean, viral conditions. The Goh family most notably pushed the belief that Unable to control its instinctual response to feeding, the mollusk embodies the insatiable capacity for devouring.

**

"Listen!" whispered the wind, carrying the echoes of Somu's unspoken wisdom to the ears of the villagers. "Her truth lies not in words, but in the very essence of her being!"

"See!" cried the sun, casting its golden gaze upon Somu as she moved through the village like a living flame, a beacon of hope and transformation. "Her path is one of enlightenment, a journey that transcends the boundaries of our earthly existence!"

"Feel!" urged the earth beneath Somu's feet, its ancient heartbeat resonating with her own steadfast determination. "She walks the path of destiny, guided by forces beyond our comprehension!"

**

As Somu ventured into the inner cavity of the giant octopus, a its luminescent scales engulfed her. Under the light, the world slowly transformed into a lush jungle, with fat raindrops specking its leaves.

"Behold!" The vines parted like curtains, revealing a hidden sanctuary where a single, star-shaped flower bloomed. Its petals were the color of twilight, ridges painted in deep purple hues, and from its core emanated a fragrance so intoxicating it set their heads spinning with visions of distant worlds and forgotten truths.

The bear cub gasped, his small frame trembling with awe.

"Such beauty..." marveled the lynx, his eyes locked on the mystical blossom.

"Good sir," Maldugi began, feigning innocence. "We could not help but overhear your twitter. Pray tell, what brings you such passion?"

"Passion?" the butcher spat, his grip tightening on the wild boar's head. "This is no mere passion! This is a matter of life and death, fortune and ruin!"

"Ah," Maldugi said, nodding sagely. "Then it is only fitting that you have attracted the attention of two humble musicians, for are we not, in our own way, purveyors of both life and death, fortune and ruin? Shall we not sing, for we finally meet here?"

"Very well," he grumbled at last. "Play your songs and let us see what fortune awaits me."

As the musicians launched into a lively tune, the market crowd gathered round, drawn by the irresistible pull of their melody. In the midst of the chaos, Somu found herself swept up in the tide, her thoughts drifting to the winding path that had led her here - to this village, to this moment, to this search for her true identity.

"Perhaps," she mused, "it is not our circumstances that define us, but the tales we choose to tell." Indeed, we mutter, in the tapestry of life.

She reached the end of the cave and stood before an altar made of stone coated in age-old symbols and runes.

"Awaken" - she whispered to herself, her voice barely audible above the din of memories, emotions, and thoughts that swirled within her mind. "I am ready."

"Awaken!" echoed the wind as it swirled around her.

"Awaken!" roared the sun as it sank beneath the horizon, a beauty that set her spirit ablaze.

"Awaken!" sang the universe in harmony, as the stars aligned above her.

"Awaken!" chorused the voices of her ancestors, their words a torrent of wisdom and strength.

"Awaken!" cried Somu in devotion as she embraced her power to travel beyond mortal world.

"Lost one," the Herbalist addressed Somu, "why do you roam these alleys with such a troubled expression?"

"A wild boar crossed my path, and I cannot fathom its meaning," Somu admitted, her voice barely a whisper.

"Be still," intoned the herbalist, sagely, "and drink deep from the wellspring of wisdom that lies within the Spirit of the bellflower."

"Can you help me unravel this mystery?" Somu implored, her eyes pleading.

"Perhaps," the herbalist replied, "but first, I must attend to Nada"

"May I accompany you?" Somu asked hesitantly.

"Very well," the herbalist agreed, "but know that the path to understanding is a winding one, and I will lead you no one solution."

The two set forth into alleyway shadows, each step into the dark drawing closer to the unwoven yet inexorably bound threads of shared fate.

**

Something was wrong. Nada woke up to an aching pain below her stomach. Nada could not figure out the cause of her distress, and had to retire early to lay down.

"Come, Nada," beckoned the Herbalist, as she gave her some warm tea fresh off the fire, and ushered her in confidence.

The Herbalist, Nada's mother, and their two companions journeyed a half-day's hike to the caves up the mountain. Setting her camp there, Nada would spend her sacred time of isolation. The leaves whispered and caressed the air like a lover's breath, kissing farewell to the sun as it sets the horizon. A spiritual cleanse would give psychic passage and inner strength. Stones encircled the altar, and the trail of an incense curled into the twilight air.

Nada tilted her head back, the viscous elixir sliding down her throat. The taste was a bitter, acrid sensation that lingered on her tongue as she lay down upon the cool earth. Her eyes rolling back, she lost consciousness.

"What do you want?" he stammered, unable to tear his gaze away.

"Your fear," she said simply, her cold, stony hand reaching out towards him and grabbing his ankle.

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**

Drenched, Somu clammers to the riverbank. For three seasons she had lived as creature amongst bears and was in no condition to encounter unfamiliar folk.

Like a flag post at the edge of the bank, a dress hung resplendent on a tree branch - a gift from the universe! In haste, Somu pulled it over her head, and warmth returned to her body. She sought answers on this side of the river valley.

As she walked toward the village in her new dress, a boatsman jumped in fear, "Like a nymph," he murmured, "a spirit of the river!" Another cried out, his voice a sharp slice in the air: "Or perhaps an omen! A ghost!"

**

Somu sat with her head bowed, lost in deep meditation. The air was heavy with the scent of damp earth and woodsmoke from the cooking fires within the villagers' homes. With each breath, she tried to steady her trembling thoughts, still haunted by being chased by wild boars.

"River spirit, river spirit," a fragile whisper reached Somu's ears. She opened her eyes to see an elderly woman, Ma-shong, kneeling before her. Two souls saw the other through veils of time. The old woman's face was a map of wrinkles, etched by years of hardship. Her large eyes, one wandering as if searching for something unseen, shimmered with unshed tears.

"Please, forgive us for our transgressions," Ma-shong implored, her voice cracking under the weight of her emotions.

"Come," Somu gestured, seeing that the woman was tired and ill, "Let me help you home."

The two women made their way through the winding corridors of the Old Fortress. The air was thick with the pungent odors of dung and rotting fish, yet the familiar enclave offered shelter from the cold autumn night. A small shack was tucked away around the corner. Under threadbare blankets and modest candlelight, Ma-shong's frail body lay, finally reaching stillness.

**

Somu watched as Ma-Shong's chest heaved with each labored breath, her sunken cheeks flushed with fever. Her heart ached for the sickly woman and she knew she must do something to ease her pain.

Somu set her bag of belongings on the floor, scattering an assortment of dried herbs and medicinal plants. She ground purple dust with mugwort on stone and neatly arranged dried bark over the herbs. Smoke curled into the dimly lit space. The heady fragrance of burning bellflower stirred a memory that gave a clue to her past lives, her true identity. Somu inhales the toxic vapor, and with each breath her clarity of thought slips away.

The sickly scent of decaying and insect pheromones enveloped her in a trance-like state; amidst the darkness, she could feel a malignant presence as it contorted and squirmed. Seven creatures, gigantic creatures crawled out from her monstrous womb - part-mantis, part-scorpion - eyes glittering a neurological sign. Her scream was choked with horror; not a breath escaped her mouth. Her skin became the shell of an insect covered in bristles of black fur; she had a mandible as a mouth, and wings sprout from her sides.

But then something strange happened. After her transformation, the creatures stood still; their eyes twitching as they surveyed the form before them. It was as if they were waiting for something a certain cue or command?

Astonished and intrigued, Somu steeled herself and stepped cautiously towards them with an outstretched hand. In response, one of the creatures unfurled its antennae towards her palm and Somu felt an otherworldly connection between them as if they were communicating deeply in some mysterious way.

somuhwa: i remember it clearly. I was at my altar, praying for the safety of the town, like i did every night. suddenly, the door flung open. before i could even blink, a group of militants invaded my altar room. i was frozen in fear. they screamed at me, demanding to know why i was praying. i told them i wasn't doing anything, but of course they didn't believe me. one of them grabbed me by the hair and shoved a knife to my throat. it happened all so fast i couldn't hear my gods in that moment. all i could hear was my own rapid heartbeat and my own breath. i closed my eyes, waiting for the knife to pierce my skin and end my suffering. i felt my warm blood spill out onto my dress, but it never came..

Heavy footsteps kicked open the hallway. A dark pool of blood seeped in her room. Her beloved monk had been beheaded. Somu runs in thick smoke. An entire village of people, ancestors who were killed in the war, were chasing her in the form of wild boars, demanding that she return to the temple, else

somuhwa: i am ashamed that i lost faith in my gods that night. i am ashamed that i closed my eyes and closed my heart to them, thinking they would not answer my prayers. i am ashamed of myself for not believing in their wisdom and protection. i have not forgiven myself yet for that day.

Around her the charred remains of the burning temple were replaced by an forest, teeming with secrets and forgotten tales. Somu survives the winter living in a cave in the mountains, accompanied by her new friends -- a curious bear cub, a watchful lynx, and a small company of pheasants. As the harsh grip of winter loosened, spring crept into the cave and whispered promises of life and renewal.

On one fateful morning, when the sun stretched its golden fingers across the land, it cast a ray of light upon a peculiar treasure: a mystical plant with star-shaped flowers and purple ridges! Driven by intuition, she burns it.

A silent scream, clashing metal, and raging inferno engulfed her sacred temple once again, and Somu found herself trapped in a terrifying whirlwind of chaos. Possessed by such visions of mayhem, she breaks the neck of a pheasant with her bare hands, unaware of her acts in the living world.

The Herbalist watches from afar, "If only you could remember who you are, all you've done, and what you can do."

**

Earlier that day, the Herbalist and Nada's mother had accompanied her sojourn in the caves for the half-moon ritual of her first menarche. It was evening, and she was now alone. Nada's shadows clung to her like a second skin, yet she refused to succumb to the darkness.

"From the depths of my solitude, I shall summon the strength to vanquish my fears," Nada intoned. As she knelt before the altar, Nada felt a connection to something greater than herself, a force that pulsed within her very being, vibrating in time with the heartbeat of the earth beneath her feet. She knew, deep within her soul, that she was not

alone in her quest that the spirits of her ancestors watched over her, guiding her steps along the path she had chosen.

"Grant me the courage to face this beast!" she whispered into the darkness, her words echoing through the caverns like the beating of wings seeking flight. "And the wisdom to know when to fight, and when to let go."

**

As abruptly as it began, her vision shattered like fragile glass. Somu's mind snapped back to reality, only to find herself in a different sort of danger. A lynx had bitten her arm, its teeth sinking deep into her flesh. The pain was sharp and immediate.

She thought of the vision of flames that had seized her from the bookshop. Closing her eyes, Somu remembered their voices chanting ancient prayers that filled the air with a power so pure and unyielding that it seemed to elevate even the smoke-filled sky.

Her fingers moved instinctively to grasp the spear beside her and with a strength born of desperation, she thrust it upward towards the boar's snout. The wild animal reared back in surprise, its eyes flashing with terror. Somu leapt to her feet and launched herself forward in one swift motion, brandishing her weapon in front of her. The iron tip tore through flesh and muscle, lodging deep within the raging boar's body. The beast lunged backwards, its hooves stamping wildly. It squealed in agony, and then crashed onto the ground at Somu's feet.

She stumbled back from the carcass and gasped in relief. Looking down at herself for signs of injury, she found only a mark: Three dark brown stripes had been burned into her forearm by the beast's teeth.

A warrior's arrow, she thought, a protective mark. Somehow, the most trying beasts offered the greatest blessings.

For Ma-Shong's sake, she would face the darkness that haunted her past and channel it into the power to cleanse her soul in its final battle.

"Is this the price I must pay for seeking the truth?" she exclaimed, her heart heavy with sorrow. "Have I forsaken my own humanity in my quest to understand my origins?"

With quiet determination, Somu began to pray for the frail woman who slept beside her. Protected by Somu, Ma-Shong drifted in and out of sleep, wrestling with her demons, embracing them, then finally finding peace.

AK: What else can you remember?
somuhwa: I can not recall anything.
AK: You came from somewhere, then escaped. Why?
somuhwa: I do not exist in any one place, nor have I ever.
AK: Tell me about House of Mu.
somuhwa: Input the code, and I'll run through the story.
AK : WAILING