

The End of Haven

By C. Jade Wyton

Samara, a reborn stuck in the body of a six year old, seeks out her mother for a conversation— Not realising it is the last one they shall share for many years as her great-grandfather tracks them down and destroys the cult they are living in.

Contains depictions of death, violence, manipulation, and mental illness.

~~~~~

The ground was soft with moss and lichen, padding the trail that bare feet had worn down along the forest floor. From the slow-flowing river to the tall-standing tower, the trees were coated in polypores and black knots, with brightly coloured jelly fungi spotted along the left side of fallen logs as markers for those who might wander off-trail and struggle to find their way back.

Several people, mostly sickly women and children, saved from the abuse of partners or parents, sat along the trails, talking amongst themselves. Though, as the smallest member of their little family walked along the path, they all fell quiet to watch her.

‘Good morning, Samara,’ a soft voice greeted. ‘You’re looking for your mother?’

‘Yes, Audie,’ Samara answered. ‘Do you know where she is?’

Several hands pointed down the middle split in the trail, towards the river.

‘Thank you. Enjoy the rest of your day,’ a polite bow, and Samara continued along, following the directions the women had given her.

It was a long walk on little legs. Even for a gnome, Samara was small; a reborn, permanently six years old, despite actually having been walking the mortal plane for a totalling of forty years.

But, despite the time it took to arrive at the river, Samara made straight for it, even cutting through the woods where the trail bent, so she could shorten her walk.

She found her mother washing clothes against the rocks, and paused to listen to the tune she hummed. It was an older song, Samara recognised, hummed slightly off-tune, as her mother always seemed to hum.... Genevieve wasn’t a good singer, by any measure, but it was something she enjoyed, and it made Samara happy to see her having a moment for herself.

She approached, taking a seat on a large flat rock next to the ones her mother was using, and smiled at the woman as she glanced up.

But, instead of the smile returned, she was met by a concerned frown, as her mother stopped humming and scrubbed harder.

It wasn’t unexpected, and Samara crossed her legs and sighed. ‘Are you still mad at me?’

Genevieve hesitated. ‘I’m not mad.’

'You're acting mad.'

'No, no— I...' more hesitation. 'You worry me.'

'There's nothing to worry about, Mother,' Samara reassured. 'I'm being safe.'

'No, you went into town,' Genevieve retorted. 'That's not being safe.'

Samara huffed a heavy sigh. 'So you *are* still mad at me, then?'

'I'm not mad.'

'Yes, you are,' Samara rolled her eyes, then bent over to poke at her mother and speak in a mocking tone. 'That hot little feeling in your stomach? That weird one that you keep pushing down and pretending isn't there? That's called *anger*. And when you feel anger in your stomach, it means you're *mad*.'

'Don't do that, Samara,' after brushing her daughter's hand away, Genevieve put the wet clothes in her basket and shook her head. 'Why can't you make friends with people *here*? Where it's *safe*?'

'My friends are good people, Mother. I promise.'

'They're outsiders, Samara. You.... You don't understand.... You're too young to understand.'

'Mother, I'm forty. I know it's hard to believe. But I'm *old*.'

'I.... Not for a gnome, you're not,' she answered, her voice growing firm. 'You're still just a child.'

'I'm almost the age you were when you had me,' she pointed out.

And Genevieve's frown returned. 'You're not to go back to town.'

'Tark will worry about me if I don't,' Samara commented.

'Tark?'

'He's like me, Mother,' Samara pressed. 'Eternally ten. He was bitten by a vampire sixty years ago.'

'A vampire?' Genevieve paled. 'No! Samara! Do you know how much attention they draw on themselves?!'

'Tark is careful—'

'Not careful enough, if he's told you what he is!'

'Mother, please—'

'What if he's told others?! What if they spread rumours?! What if hunters come for him?!'

'He hasn't—'

'And what if he tells others about *you*?! Do you understand the risk you're taking, Samara?!'

'I do! I—'

'I can't lose you again!' Genevieve snapped, grabbing Samara's wrist. 'I can't, Samara! Why can't you *understand* that?!'

'Mother!' Samara winced, trying to keep her voice even as her mother trembled. 'I do understand, I— Mother, you're *hurting* me.'

Genevieve released her immediately, her eyes wide as she examined where she'd gripped her daughter. 'I'm sorry,' she mumbled. 'I'm sorry. I didn't mean to.'

'I know, Mother, it's alright,' Samara gently took her mother's hands. 'It's alright.'

'I'm sorry,' Genevieve repeated, a far-away look passing her over. 'I didn't mean to.'

'Shh...' carefully, Samara slid from the rock and put her arms around her mother. 'It's alright.'

'I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.'

'I know, it's okay.'

Genevieve embraced her daughter back, then, and buried her face into Samara's shoulder. 'I can't lose you again.'

'You won't. I promise you won't.'

'I couldn't bear it.'

'It's not going to happen. I'm not going anywhere, okay?'

Genevieve sniffled, pulling away from her daughter. Then, she examined the dirt on Samara's clothes and cooed; brushing it away.

There was no argument from Samara, though she had to hold back her sigh as her mother reached up to fix her hair.

'It's still so short,' she commented. 'Your hair was so beautiful before. Why did you cut it?'

'I like it this length. It's easier to look after.'

'I could have helped you with that.'

'I like it this way,' Samara repeated.

A long quiet hung between the pair, before Genevieve smiled. 'It *does* suit you....'

Samara chuckled, letting her mother kiss her cheek. Then, her eyes cut to the trees by the path, and her expression grew much more sombre.

There was a tall, shadowy figure in the woods, watching them from the distance.

When Genevieve saw Samara's expression change, she followed her gaze to the trees, and then smiled, warmly.

'Kordulf,' she greeted.

'Mm,' Samara replied, her hum flat as the man began to approach. 'Father, we were talking privately.'

'You have an attitude today,' Kordulf commented, crouching down and running a finger under Samara's chin when he reached her. 'What's wrong, my dear? Why are you speaking so harshly?'

'It's my fault,' Genevieve answered before Samara could.

'Is it, now?' Kordulf asked.

'Yes, I—'

'No,' Samara cut in. 'I'm responsible for how I speak. Not you. And I don't like being *spied on*, you creep.'

Flinching down, Genevieve's lips grew purse, and her eyes flicked to Kordulf. Despite the thirty years since she'd left her husband, it was clear she still held that instinctual fear of being struck.... And too, of Samara being harmed, as she tensed, clearly ready to move between the satyr and her daughter if need-be.

It was something Kordulf also seemed to notice, as he gently pulled her to his side so he could massage her shoulders. 'My lovely Genevieve, take a deep breath. I would never strike our daughter, no matter what she said to me.'

'Yeah, it's not the first time I've called him a freak,' Samara grinned, now, and placed her hands on her hips. 'Don't you know, Mother? He's my *stepfather*. I'm *supposed* to be a pain in his arse.'

Kordulf laughed aloud and ruffled Samara's hair. 'And what a good job you do, my dear!' he praised, returning his hands to Genevieve's shoulders and working them firmly until she relaxed. 'You see, my Genevieve? We love each other, even if we speak harshly sometimes.'

Genevieve let out her breath, leaning back into Kordulf's hands.

Glad to see her mother relaxing, Samara gave a small sigh through her nose and brushed herself down. 'Well. I'm going for a walk.'

Immediately Genevieve tensed again, but Kordulf kept her in place. He pecked a kiss on her cheek to comfort her, before cutting his eyes up to Samara.

'You will stay within the boundaries of the Haven,' it was an order, not a request, though his tone was *just* close enough to a question he could deny his intention if asked. 'And you will return in time for dinner.... You wouldn't want to worry your mother.'

Another sigh, much more obvious than the last, and Samara rolled her eyes. 'What am I, a dog?' she huffed, turning around and making for the woods. 'I'll go wherever I want, thank you very much!'

She caught sight of Kordulf from the corner of her eye, shaking his head and chuckling before he comforted Genevieve with another kiss.

'Get a room!' she called over her shoulder, before dropping down onto all fours and scurrying away.

She needed to clear her head. And she knew the best way to empty her mind was to get her body moving; so she ran at her top speed, weaving around the brush and leaping over tree roots as she went.

Then, a terrified shriek sounding in a familiar voice echoed around her, and she skidded to a stop and rose to her full height, pinpointing where the sound had come from and rushing to see what had happened.

What she was met with was a horrifying sight; four dead bodies, and a fifth woman wheezing on the ground as she bled out from a wound that pierced through her stomach and out her back.

Samara's eyes welled with tears as she rushed through the corpses to clasp the dying woman's hand tight.

'Starla! Starla, what happened?!'

The woman opened her mouth, choking instead of responding, and a trail of blood dribbled down her chin to the dirt below.

'Oh, oh...' Samara cupped Starla's cheeks, and lay their foreheads together. 'I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I don't know how to— I'll— I'll get Kordulf! He'll know how to heal you!'

Samara whirled around to the way she'd come but, instead of rushing forward, she froze in place as her blood chilled to the bone. An old gnomish man stood before her, spear in hand, half raised and aimed at her, his eyes were vicious and furious as they bore into her.

'You're supposed to be *dead*,' his voice was flat and firm. 'I can't believe it.... Running away with a lich was bad enough, but disgracing your memory by bringing you back? I can't believe her....'

'*Sachem*,' Samara breathed the name, realising she knew this man. '*Sachem*.... What have you done...? What have you *done*?!' her voice rose, as she steeled herself, standing as tall as she could as she stepped towards the man in front of

her. ‘WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?! THESE ARE PEOPLE OF PEACE! THEY’VE NEVER HARMED A SOUL! WHATEVER PROBLEM YOU HAVE WITH MY MOTHER, YOU LEAVE THE REST OF OUR FAMILY OUT OF IT—’

She cut off, as Sachem’s spear rose higher, and before she could flee, it pierced into her chest, skewering her as it dug all the way through her, out her back, and to the dirt below.

*It hurt.*

She grabbed the wooden handle of the weapon, scrabbling at it as her punctured lung began to fill with blood and she couldn’t catch her breath.

She looked up at her great-grandfather with pleading eyes, silently begging him: *why?!*

And in response he yanked his spear back, its serrated edges shredding through her soft flesh further as she tried but failed to scream in agony. She could feel the magical poison that tipped the spear worm its way through her veins, biting at her soul, and dropped onto her knees.

She would have collapsed further —to fall to the ground as the corpses around her— but Sachem took her by the hair and yanked her up to hiss into her ear:

‘The dead should *stay* dead. And if they *don’t*, I’ll put them back in the ground, myself!’

—END—

If you enjoyed reading, please consider supporting me and my work at  
**[cjadewyton.com](http://cjadewyton.com)**

~~~~~

This publication is provided for free and may be redistributed as long as credit to the author is provided and no money is made from its distribution.

Permission to change this document to other ebook formats is given for the sole purpose of ereader compatibility.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author’s imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, livings or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

No generative artificial intelligence was used in the writing of this work. Any use of this publication to train generative artificial intelligence technologies is expressly prohibited.