

That Which Survives

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Rating: K+

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Her name... it didn't matter any more although the ancient peoples called her 'Mana A'Trao' - Mother of All. But that was forgotten eons ago, even before the threat of Pata A'Trao's death throes. The decrepitude brought on by his advancing age had rendered her, his daughter/wife, little more than a brittle husk. There was no warmth in his glow. Nothing grew under his baleful gaze.

She had protected her children against Pata A'Trao's failure as best she could but it hadn't been enough. They had been forced to use their technology to keep themselves alive, moving further and further from her until only a rare few knew of a time she was abundant and nurturing and able to care for them - and they were called madmen and witches. The more fortunate were called dreamers - but theirs was a society that didn't abide dreamers any more than it tolerated madmen and witches. They had no time for Mana A'Trao.

More fools, they. *They* had run out of time. Poor ephemeral children.

Mana A'Trao turned to the weavers of fate, the three sister/daughters who chose to stand with her until the bitter end.

The weaver-witches of fate watched as their father convulsed, destroying everything within reach. Cutter the Inexorable, the eldest of the three weavers, snipped the threads that dangled from the tapestry of life - nothing more would or could be added to the tapestry. She paused at the final thread, casting a questioning look at her sisters and mother. This one thread belonged to the last child born on a dying world - a child born of two dreamers willing to cast the fate of their son, the last hope of their world, to the winds between the stars.

Mana A'Trao held out her hand to touch the final thread. She noted it was longer than the other threads had been - much longer. The color was different, too. Stronger and more vibrant. It reminded Mana A'Trao of what her children had been once - a long time ago, before she and her sisters were labeled the fantasies of sick minds.

The four witches shuddered as Pata A'Trao convulsed again. The tapestry shivered into dust, leaving only the one bright thread behind.

"Where will he go?" Spinner asked. Her job had been to spin the tapestry thread from soul-stuff. She looked wan and spent. They all did.

"Gaia," Mana A'Trao answered.

The three ancient witches nodded in understanding. Gaia was vibrant with life and energy, her races young and energetic. Her air would sustain Mana A'Trao's last son as would the light of Father Sol, still in his golden prime.

Pata A'Trao collapsed in on himself, shedding his outer shell in a paroxysm of stellar violence. Mana A'Trao felt her bones crack and turn to poison. Her sisters screamed in agony.

The father led his tired five-year-old from the old truck and headed into the farm house. It was way past the boy's bedtime but the boy kept protesting through his yawns that he wasn't tired.

The mother had already taken the boy's collection of chocolate treats to put them away to be handed back to him over the next few weeks.

The father carefully avoided the turnip candles guarding the path to the front porch. That was one of the mother's many customs ever since they were married. A beribboned corn dolly hung high on the wall above the fireplace to celebrate the harvest and bring good favor for next year. The mother may have been an upstanding church-going woman, but she was something more as well, as her well tended herb garden attested.

It was one of things they didn't really talk about. She knew he didn't believe in hocus pocus - he barely believed in what they taught in church - so she practiced her customs alone and he stayed out of it although he did listen in when the boy asked about setting out a plate for the 'visitors'.

"Tonight is the night when the barriers between worlds is weakest," the mother explained. "And even though most of the visitors from the other side only want to say hello, we don't want to encourage them to come into the house to stay."

The father opened the door to the house and the boy ran ahead. The mother had made sandwiches for a late snack before they left for town. Trick-or-treating was hard work.

Then the boy stopped and stared out of the living room window. "Who are they?" he asked in a hushed tone.

"Who are who?" the father asked. He only saw his and his adopted son's reflections in the glass.

"I saw three... four witches staring at me," the boy whispered.

"Witches?" the mother asked.

"They were wearing black but their faces were white like ghosts. They smiled at me," the boy said.

Mana A'Trao smiled at the boy even though she knew he couldn't see her. She and her sisters were broken but they lived on through her last child. Gaia had accepted him with open and loving arms. His thread was woven into the live tapestry of this world now. His fate belonged to Lachesis and Atropos. The thread of his children would be spun by Clotho, not Spinner.

Krypton survived.