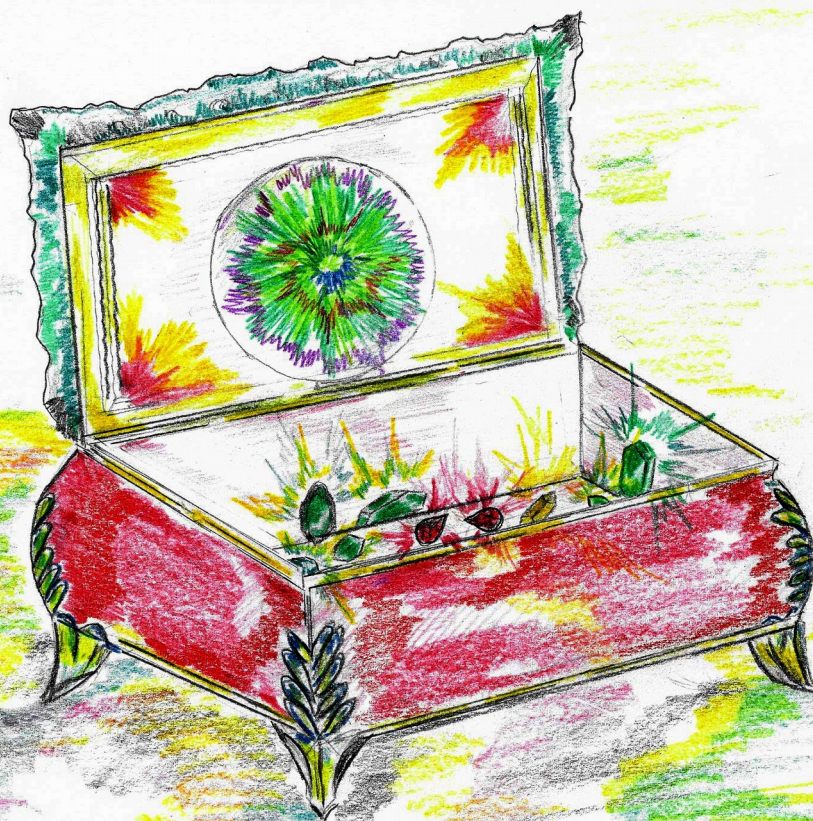


CRYSTALIS
MU
PART 2



Crystalis Mu (A Part of *The Crystalis Saga*)

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Rebirth

Several years had passed since the birth of King Octavius and Queen Athena's daughter, Onita. With her fair skin, small eyes and thin nose, Princess Onita didn't look much like her mother. And the princess' resemblance to Octavius was minimal at best. Octavius suggested "Onita" as homage to his grandmother of the same name; stating in conversations that his daughter looked just like her. Princess Onita was very smart for her age, knowing facts centuries old without being taught or told. Awkwardly quiet Princess Onita was. Gonaga's third princess also didn't play with other children age, only members of her family.

The people of Gonaga went on with their lives, never paying attention to their princess' unique ways. Serena and Jake watched their niece turn from a barely mobile infant into a relatively independent young lady in their backyard. Several nights a week Onita would eat dinner and stay the night in her uncle and aunt's home. Russell and Rini grew up alongside their cousin, teaching her everything they knew. Jake trained his son while Russell worked with him in his shop after school. Rini started showing her physical strength was only matched by her mental aptitude when she completed her secondary education a year and a half early.

Before and following their graduation, Rini teased her big brother about his lack of scholastic accomplishments compared to hers. And just like when they were as children, an argument ensued that their father would stoke and Serena had to break up while scolding Jake for trying to turn their kids against each other.

"You can't keep getting them mad at each other like that," Serena told her husband after sending Rini and Russell to their respective rooms.

Jake smiled at his wife, stating, "A little siblin' rivalry never hurt anyone. Besides, Russell could stand to learn somethin' from Rini in havin' a little more drive. For goodness' sakes, the girl

barely uses a sword and she's got better technique than Russell; and that boy trains everyday."

"You're going to drive him away if you keep talking like that."

The sound of Russell walking down the hall toward the kitchen where his parents talked stopped whatever response Jake had in mind. Jake peered behind him to find Russell leaving the house with his sword in hand.

When Russell exited the house, Jake said to his wife, "As you can see I'm drivin' him to be a better man than he could ever imagine."

"Like Oni did for you?" hastily Serena retorted.

"Way to twist my intentions."

The next night during dinner, Rini started another argument with her brother by stating he had no intentions of cementing his future by working under the king and queen like she planned to do in the near future.

Russell explained to his sister, "For your information, Ms. Gonaga, I'm all about improving' myself. Just last night I spent hours after dinner trainin' on strengthenin' the connection of my mental and physical resolve."

"Yeah, we all heard you grunting like you were constipated."

A slight twinge on Serena's forehead was a precursor to their mother ordering her children, "Okay, that's enough about that."

Russell and Rini immediately stopped talking.

Still chewing his food, Jake said, "See, Serena, they don't need me to make things worse."

Finishing her meal, Rini figured this was the perfect time to ask her parents a question that had been bothering her for a while, "Mother, Father, what was Oni like?"

The stunned looks on Jake and Serena's faces made Rini explain herself, "I mean, I know she's pretty much a dirty word around here, but there's always two sides to every story. And I know the people who write the history books we used at school didn't know her like you did. Was she really that

evil?”

To his daughter’s shock, Jake admitted, “Rini, at her heart, Oni was just like any of us.”

Similar to Rini following her startling question was Jake explaining himself, “Between the time she was born and the time she came to power, somethin’ took hold of her – somethin’ evil. That force caused her to do the things she did and made her hungry for power. But deep down there was an individual who wanted people to trust her, believe in her, and most importantly, believe in her action that would help the world; though her idea of changing the world wouldn’t be helpful for the rest of us.”

Rini turning her attention to her rising mother made Serena say, “I just know that she almost killed my father, abducted both Mother and Athena, and tried to kill me so she could destroy the world to rebuild it in her own image with the stolen Gonagan Crystal. I don’t know how much more evil you can get.”

Moving from her table to the sink behind her, Serena had to know, “Rini, why did you have to bring that up?”

Rini leaned back in her chair, looking at the ceiling.

Still staring upwards, Rini answered her mother, “Today I was helping Onita prepare for her quiz on the Great Ocean Cry when she started talking about how she sympathized with Oni. She said, and I quote, ‘Is it so wrong that Oni felt the need to return the world to its original form so the atrocities of things like war would never happen?’ I really thought about her words, and thought about Oni’s want to do something good for the world was just corrupted following her defeat by our great-great grandfather and the land she thought could help complete her goal. Father said it himself, Oni wasn’t completely evil.”

Russell had some feelings on the matter, stating, “But it wasn’t her place to play God and shape the world like she wanted. When you really think about it, her intent wasn’t to help the people, but to change the world to suit her own needs. Maybe she had all the good intent in the world, but what she

did was pure evil. There's no way someone could sympathize with that."

Jake started smiling when all eyes returned to him.

"I guess that workout did help Russell last night," Jake remarked. "The thing is Oni had some goodness in her, even if it was a sliver. But the fact is Oni accepted the darkness inside of her, and that darkness corrupted anything she did. Like Russell said, there's nothin' to sympathize about that."

Feeling satisfied with the conversation, Rini moved on to her next topic, "Okay, now that we've got the philosophical stuff out of the way, there's something else I've noticed. For years I've tried to figure out whom Onita looks like, and helping Onita with her studying yesterday made me remember she has a lot of similar features of Oni. Maybe my eyes were playing tricks on me, but they look oddly alike."

Russell agreeing with his sister noticeably angered their mother. When Serena scolded her children for supposedly insulting their cousin, Jake admitted he observed the same thing.

From Serena came the words, "I can't believe what I'm hearing," following Jake's confession.

Jake tried to calm his wife by saying, "It's nothin' to get upset about. There's a lotta people in the world that look alike in certain ways but have no real bloodline connection. Onita just might be one of those people. It doesn't mean she's going to grow up, kill Athena and Octavius, and take over the world."

This startling conversation ended immediately after Jake's statement, though Serena's mind wasn't at rest. Serena tossed and turned all night until sunrise. Shaking Jake from his deep sleep, Serena demanded they pay her sister a visit. Becoming aware of her family's presence upon their arrival at Gonaga Castle excited the queen.

Queen Athena hurried to the foyer Serena and Jake only entered a minute earlier to greet them, "Hi, you guys! What brings you here today? Oh, you want to know what Onita wants for her birthday?"

Unusually bold in tone with someone other than his children, Jake approached his sister-in-law

with some words, “Actually, we had a weird conversation over dinner last night about the birthday girl.”

Athena didn’t understand what Jake meant by, “Weird?”

With Serena standing beside him, staring off in the distance, Jake informed his questioner, “Seemingly, Onita’s an Oni sympathizer.”

“What? Is this true, Serena?”

Rather than speak, Serena nodded her head in agreement with Jake’s revelation. Athena stood before her family members, dumbfounded.

Jake decided he better explain himself a little more, “Rini was helpin’ her study about the Great Ocean Cry when Onita expressed her belief that what Oni had in mind for the world was actually good.”

“Is that all?” Athena asked. “You’re telling me you were worried about Onita having a different view of events than you or your children?”

Serena quietly admitted, “Rini somewhat agreed with her at first.”

Jake wasn’t done talking, “But then there’s that other thing Rini brought up. I don’t know if we’re the only ones who noticed it, but as Onita ages her facial features are starting to resemble Oni. Not even mentioning the skin color, there’s the nose, the mouth, even her eyes have that same shade of brown as Oni. It’s--”

Understandably growing agitated, Queen Athena interrupted, “That’s why you’re here; to tell me my daughter is a sympathizer of some evil witch and how they look alike?”

Serena spoke in defense of Onita, “I told Jake that it’s all just one big coincidence.”

Jake couldn’t believe what Serena was saying, exclaiming, “You told me?”

Ignoring Jake, Serena did have a question for her sister, “I know Octavius says Onita’s the spitting image of his grandmother, but have you seen a picture of her to confirm that?”

After taking a few moments to calm herself, Athena confessed, “Well, no, I’ve never seen a

picture of Octavius' grandmother.”

Before the conversation between Queen Athena, her sister & Jake could continue, Octavius entered the castle after working in the Courtyard to help set up Onita's party.

“Hello, my beautiful in-laws,” is how Octavius greeted Jake and Serena prior to asking why his guests were here.

Jake started talking over Serena so she didn't say anything out of line, “We just wanted to know what Onita wanted for her birthday. Right, Athena?”

“Yes,” the queen impishly told her husband. “That's what they were doing.”

With Jake's statement and Athena's confirmation satisfying him, Octavius excused himself so he could get Onita some lunch. The king made sure to offer his brother and sister-in-law something as well, but Jake graciously refused for himself and his wife. Hugging Serena, shaking Jake's hand, and kissing Athena, Octavius left the area to enter the kitchen.

Serena's voice lowered upon saying to her sister, “Athena, for the sake of settling this, see if there's any way to get a picture of Octavius' grandmother.”

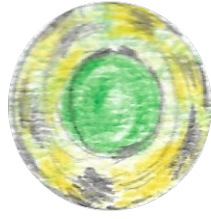
Following an embrace and a kiss, Athena agreed to do her best in finding the requested photo. The walk home for Jake and Serena was relatively quiet, almost somber.

Rini rushed her parents with a question when they returned home, “What did Aunt Athena say?”

Answering his daughter was Jake, “She has a little bit of concern as well. Aunt Athena promised to look for a picture of Octavius' grandmother. Now, if you're done with the great inquisition, can we get somethin' to eat?”

Jake left his daughter's side to tell Russell their plans for the evening. Entering Russell's bedroom, Jake discovered his son wasn't there. Calling out to Rini, Jake asked if Russell told her where he was going.

Rini told her father, “You know how that boy is. He was all like, ‘I'm goin' out. And don't think you can follow me.’”



In actuality, Russell decided to take his own trip to the castle. Russell maneuvered his way into the Conference Room after entering Gonaga Castle. Searching the pale white room revealed a microphone to Russell.

Pressing a button to turn the microphone on, Russell made an announcement with some added bass in his voice to hopefully disguise himself, “Attention, staff, there is a meeting being called now. Queen Athena, King Octavius and Princess Onita should report to the Conference Room immediately.”

Shocked at what they were hearing, the library-occupying king and queen looked at each other in utter shock.

Athena asked her husband, “Did you call a meeting?”

The king shook his head from left to right to motion he hadn’t. Wanting to discover the meaning of this announcement, the queen approached the library’s exit. King Octavius grabbed his wife’s right arm.

“No,” the King of Gonaga commanded. “If anyone’s going in there, it’s me and me alone. If anything happens, you get Onita to your sister’s.”

Octavius cautiously neared the Conference Room’s only door. Removing a knife from his right boot and hiding the blade behind his back, Gonaga’s king entered this unexpected meeting place. To Octavius’ astonishment sat Russell in a chair at the large black marble table’s head; directly across from Octavius’ entrance.

“Yo, Uncle Octavius!” Russell said while revoking in his seat.

Octavius put his knife back in his footwear as Russell jumped on top of the table.

Russell plopped down on his surface, motioning for his uncle to take the seat Russell previously occupied.

“What are you doing calling a meeting?” Octavius asked after slightly reclining in his new spot.

Before Russell could answer, Octavius threw out another question, “And where are your parents?”

Russell stood on the table again so he could look down on his uncle to tell him, “I’ll ask the questions here. I know my parents came up here earlier and asked you about what Onita said. Is this true?”

A slight chuckle exited King Octavius prior to his response, “Okay, I’ll humor you. Yes they did.”

“So what do you think about someone, let alone your own daughter, sympathizin’ with a beast like Oni?”

A somewhat stunned look appeared on the king’s face before it slowly melted away. Rising like his nephew, Octavius began circling the table Russell was perched upon so he could collect his thoughts.

“Russell, do you really think everything you’ve read in those history books in school, and everything those teachers tell you is the truth?” Octavius asked.

“I guess you’ve been talkin’ with my sister. So what’s not true?”

“Some things about Oni. Onita’s a bright girl who can see there are two sides to every story. And while Oni did go about her plan in an ‘evil’ manner, you can’t help but think if she wasn’t corrupted by power she wouldn’t be looked upon as she is today. Russell, there are times in life where we must stand up; even when everyone else thinks we’re wrong. Onita understands that. Your parents understand that. And I guarantee that one day, you’ll understand it, too. Now, if we’re done with this little ‘meeting’, I have to help your aunt prepare dinner. You are more than welcomed to stay.”

Approaching his smirking uncle, Russell turned down Octavius' gracious offer, "Naw, the folks wanna go out tonight, and I'm probably holdin' them up."

Russell – who was only a couple of inches shorter than Octavius – patted the king's right shoulder before telling him, "One day I'll see the world. And when I do, I can really see different sides to one situation like you can."

Russell's statement brought a full-blown smile to Octavius' face as he watched Russell leave the room and Gonaga Castle.

Halfway home was Russell when he heard someone yell his name. Turning to his left in the sound's direction, Russell witnessed a short teenage girl running toward him. This girl's light brown eyes sparkled in the waning sunlight. In front of Russell stopped the young lady with the thin-lipped mouth and pointy nose decided to give Russell a tight hug.

Looking down at the familiar brown hair, Russell couldn't help but think, *Of all the people I had to run into when I'm in a rush, it had to be you, Jade.*

When Jade – Jas and Raye's daughter – relinquished her grip of Russell, she immediately asked, "Why didn't you hug me back."

Nonchalantly he replied, "I'm not a hugger," before turning to continue his walk home.

Jade grabbed Russell's left arm to halt him from leaving the alley's exit where they stood.

"You're just gonna walk off?" Jade said. "We haven't seen each other since graduation. Where have you been?"

Once again, Russell responded in a lackadaisical manner, "Yeah, I've been busy. You know, helpin' the old man and whatnot."

Another voice suddenly echoed out from the alley's depths behind Russell and Jade, "You won't be helpin' your old man no more!"

Russell spun around to find a man no taller than himself with a knife in his right hand. Upon seeing the man, Russell let out a loud sigh.

The robber ordered Russell to, “Gimme everything ya got kid, or I’ll take you and ya little girlfriend out!”

Russell calmly told this hopeful thief, “We don’t have anything.”

When their mugger repeated himself, Russell turned to Jade, saying, “Seriously, is this guy deaf or somethin’? I don’t have anything. You don’t have anything. And yet he stands here with some pathetic knife tryin’ to hold up two people who are probably young enough to be his kids. Mom always said I shouldn’t walk through alleys around nighttime. I guess Gonaga isn’t so peaceful and pure after all.”

Jade couldn’t help but giggle at Russell’s statement; infuriating the already frustrated robber.

“I guess you two don’t know what kinda situation y’all are in,” the attempting thief declared – putting a stop to Jade’s laughter.

Russell said to the man, “Sir, *you* don’t know what kinda situation you’ve gotten yourself into.”

With his back to Jade, Russell motioned for his friend to take a spot in front of this wannabe criminal.

Smiling, Russell said, “Now, if you may, Jade, can you show this idiot a little bit of what this situation is.”

After telling Jade that she brought a beating on herself, the robber thrust forward with his knife. To the aggressor’s amazement, the knife missed Jade’s body completely. Somehow, Jade slipped behind the mugger; punching him in his lower back before he could realize what happened. Losing his balance, this potential crook found himself kneeling at Russell’s feet.

Russell squatted in front of the hurting man to say, “Now, I believe you’ve learned your lesson; but I can’t be too sure. Like my old man always says--”

The thief yelped, “Screw your old man!”

“Oooohhhh!” bellowed Jade when Russell’s eyes focused in her direction from the source of such a terribly rude response.

Seeing Russell's attention shift off of him, the robber went for broke by lunging at Russell. The thief abruptly hit something like an invisible brick wall.

Falling towards the ground again as his nose spurted blood, the visibly injured thief audibly wondered, "What was that?"

Before the robber could completely lose his footing, Russell grabbed him by the front of his shirt to pitch their would-be assaulter across the street into a row of trashcans. Shaking his head following the collision, the thief couldn't believe his eyes when he peered up to find Russell standing in front of him once again.

The crook screamed, "How did you get over here so fast?"

Russell not answering caused the robber to attempt at punching Russell in his groin. Quickly lowering himself, Russell caught the incoming right fist and turned the mugger's arm so his elbow was facing the thief's body.

"Who are you?" the robber whimpered from his seated, pained position.

"Just the son of some old man," Russell responded. "An old man everyone calls 'Jake.'"

Jade and Russell's hopeful mugger started trembling as he asked, "You mean.... You-you're his son?"

Letting go of his target, Russell moved from spot; heading in Jade's direction while the failed thief tried to get up. Jade abruptly ran past Russell toward their downed adversary.

To the noticeably fearful man Jade said, "You know, I do have something I can give you."

Jade peered behind her & winked at Russell before stomping the thief in his right leg.

A loud crack echoed as the thief started yelling, "You broke my leg!"

The now grinning Jade enthusiastically replied, "And that was from my dad – the great and powerful Jas!"

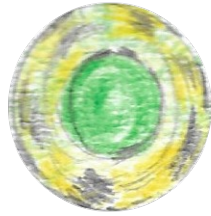
Russell grabbed Jade's arms, pulling her away from this man struggling to stand. Russell insisted on walking Jade home to ensure that nothing like that happened to Jade again.

Jade vocalized her gratitude, “Thanks, Russell. Behind Rini, you’re my best friend in the whole world.”

“Really?” Russell said. “I would think you’d have more interestin’ friends than me and Rini. You have an annoyin’ personality, but one that lends itself to people.”

Perplexed, Jade stopped in her tracks to state, “I honestly don’t know how to take that.”

Russell patted the top of Jade’s head before telling her, “Take it as a compliment from your second best friend.”



The next two weeks flew by as the anticipation for Princess Anita’s birthday party grew more and more. Gonagans from all over dropped off presents at the castle’s front gate daily. When the day finally arrived, Queen Athena dressed her daughter in an immaculate, jewel embroidered, emerald-colored dress.

It didn’t take long for the princess to express her embarrassment, “It’s bad enough that I’m wearing this extravagant thing, but even worse is the fact my friends and family have to see me dressed like some pageant contestant.”

“I can’t believe the future Queen of Gonaga is complaining about looking nice,” her mother responded. “You just don’t know how good you’ve got it.”

As Queen Athena grabbed her daughter’s shoes, Princess Onita had to know, “Do you really think I’ll be a great leader?”

‘Of course,’ the queen said, kneeling beside Onita. “It’s in your blood.”

Princess Onita continued after standing in her new shoes, “I’ve been thinking, since Gonaga is the most powerful land in the world, and every land agrees to do whatever you and Father want, wouldn’t it be more appropriate to be called an ‘empress’ rather than ‘queen’, Mother?”

A befuddled Queen Athena asked, “Like Oni?”

“Yes, but she didn’t deserve the title. She didn’t rule Gonaga. She ruled a rock that sank after she died. You’re an empress.”

“While you’re right about the other lands looking at Gonaga for guidance at times, places like Majan and Tyrong have their own governments. We wouldn’t dare step on their toes. That’s what Oni wanted to do.”

The Queen of Gonaga took a seat on her only child’s bed, looking at Onita admiring herself in the mirror.

“But a great leader must also realize that actions are everything,” the queen said when Onita finished twirling. “No matter the reason, if you don’t act with the peoples’ interests in mind, you’re not truly a leader. That’s what Oni didn’t understand. And, hopefully, it’s something you’ll become more knowledgeable of in the future.”

Turning her back to her mirror, the princess told her mother, “No, I already know that.”

In the castle’s Courtyard that witnessed the wedding reception of King Octavius and Queen Athena held the princess’ seventh birthday party. Princess Onita spent her time with the people she was closest to – Rini and Russell – rather than the children of various dignitaries from Majan and Tyrong invited by Octavius that were around her age. When Jas finally made it to the party with his family in tow, Jake immediately pulled him aside to show off his son – who was busy attaining the attention of a Tyrongy girl.

Jas and Jake were only a few sentences deep in their conversation when the approaching King of Gonaga excitedly called out, “Hello, my fine friends! How are you on this glorious day?”

Before they could answer their king, Dash entered the room. King Octavius didn’t understand

the abrupt change in Jake and Jas' demeanors until he noticed someone's shadow nearing him.

Suddenly, Dash leaned against the wall beside the three. The once familiar grin that hadn't been seen on Dash's face in years returned as Jas tipped toward his old friend. Jas leaned over, smelling Dash for some odd reason. Dash peered at his friend, wondering why Jas was taking in so many sniffs of his body.

With awe in his voice and eyes, Jas blurted out, "Dash, you don't smell like barley! What's going on?"

Dash answered without losing his grin, "Well, I was lookin' at some old photos of me and Ken, and decided to stop drinkin'. It was like an epiphany, you know?"

Patting Dash on his back was Jas while Jake verbally congratulated his friend, "Great, man. Now, if we can only find you a woman."

Queen Athena called everyone's attention to Princess Onita starting to open her presents following Dash's arrival. Moving through the generous gifts from Gonaga's townspeople, Onita finally got to the presents from her family. The mixture of books, dresses, shoes, and money pleased the princess. When it seemed Onita had opened all of her gifts, Athena stepped forward with a rectangular black box.

"To my precious daughter," Queen Athena said with a gleam in her eyes. "In this box sits something greater than special. Rather than explain it right now, open it to see what I mean."

Taking the item from her mother, Princess Onita opened the soft container to find an exquisite jewelry box containing a beautiful silver necklace. The present was accented by an even more gorgeous piece of emerald-colored crystal dangling from its end.

With her niece holding the necklace for everyone to see, Serena said to herself, "That's *the* crystal."

Athena unknowingly confirmed her sister's suspicions seconds later, "In your hand, my Onita, is the last remaining fragment of the Gonagan Crystal."

The stunned princess mumbled, “The Crystal of Gonaga?”

As Queen Athena’s mouth opened to say something, Onita dropped to her knees. Everyone rushed the collapsing princess, feverishly asking her if she was okay. A huge burst of energy suddenly erupted from the princess’ body, sending everyone around her – including Rini and Jade – flying until they hit a wall.

Dash horrifically looked toward Jake and Serena staring at Princess Onita’s pulsating body while Jas clutched his wife to protect her from the debris of flying food and Onita’s presents. Russell ran over to his hurting sister and Jade to shield them like Jas was doing for Raye.

When the quick wave of destruction finally settled, Dash distressingly asked, “Jake, do you feel that?”

Nodding in agreement, Jake and Serena prepared to leave upon wrangling their children. Before his parents could near him and his sister, Russell heard unnerving giggling exiting his cousin. Everyone’s focus returned to the now cackling Princess Onita.

The confused Queen of Gonaga quickly questioned her child, “Onita, what’s so funny? Are you okay?”

Though her body was unchanged, the voice emanating from Onita’s frame was a familiar one to anyone who’d heard it in the past.

Princess Onita’s laughter immediately halted so she could simply tell her mother, “I’m fine.”

Dash immediately thought, *She sounds like Oni.*

Queen Athena turned to her husband to find him stoically gazing at his straightening daughter.

Pleading with Octavius, Athena asked, “What’s wrong with her?”

“There’s nothing wrong with me, Mother,” Onita responded. “Thanks to you, I’ve finally found the vessel my spirit has searched for. Oh, it feels so good to see fear again.”

...to be continued