

**One More
Time for My
Family**

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D. Moonfire

Broken Typewriter Press • Cedar Rapids

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Chapter 1

Dinner Time

The blessed children bow their heads at every meal to give thanks to the Couple who granted them life.

—*The Marriage* 5:22

Garkinal tilted the steaming casserole away from his wife as they approached in the short hallway between the kitchen and the dining room. The potholders scuffed along the wall as he tilted his body to let her pass.

She swayed her hip out, skimming close to him, before twisting to bring her cheek near his mouth.

Obediently, he kissed her. The short hairs of his beard caressed her lower jaw. He took a deep breath to bring in the scents of candy, perfume, and smoke; all the smells of an enjoyable visit to the local festival.

The bottom of her evening dress caught against his leg before they pulled away, two parents crossing in the sea.

“I’m so hungry,” announced Janis, their youngest daughter.

“Well, it’s a good thing your mother made roast before we went to the harvest fair.” Garkinal set the casserole down in the center of the table. When he spotted a hand re-

aching past him, he smacked it with the pot holder. "It's hot, Fal."

Falim yanked his hand back. "Can't you just cool it down with your magic?"

"You know the Couple doesn't want us to use our powers frivolously. You can wait."

"But it's been hours since we've eaten."

"Well, it takes a while to get back home. At least you got to sleep in the wagon."

His son made a face. "Janis snored."

Janis stuck out her tongue. "So did you!"

Garkinal leaned over. "Your mother also snored and I think she even drooled."

Both kids burst into laughter.

He patted Falim on the head. "Just give it a second to cool down. Your mother is coming back with bread and cheese. Don't say anything about the snoring."

"What about dessert?" asked Janis, bouncing on her chair. Her dress bounced with her movements, the material still a little stiff from when it was picked up that evening at the fair. She insisted on wearing it as soon as they had bought it for her birthday last month.

"Patience." Rain came out of the hallway with a platter of thick bread and thin layers of cheese. It would go complement of the casserole made up of alternating slices of roast meat, potatoes, and carrots.

"Did you see the size of that cake? It's huge!" Janis held out her hands far apart, easily triple the size of the actual cake they had purchased.

Rain set down the bread on the table and doled it out. When she finished, she smacked the top of of Falim's head to stop him from eating. "Prayers first."

"Yes, Mama." Falim put down the bread and bowed his head.

Garkinal chuckled and sat down at the head of the table. Reaching out to his children, he rested the backs of his hands against the tablecloth and waited for their small, delicate hands to rest on his.

Eyes closed, he took a deep breath. “Blessed are we in the your grace. Cherished are we with your gifts. Loved are we in—”

The front door of their small house slammed open. The glass panes that Garkinal had fashioned himself shattered, dropping to the ground in high-pitched snaps and cracks.

Janis let out a scream of surprise.

Garkinal got up thinking that the latch on the door had gotten lose. But when he saw three men standing in his living room, he came to a halt with his hand still on the back of his chair.

They were all armed, their short shorts shone in the oil lights on each side of the door. With the light behind them, they looked like nothing more than shadows.

The middle invader looked straight at him.

“What are you doing?” Garkinal asked loudly. His feet weren’t moving despite the surge of fear that pounded in his veins and the tightness in his chest.

Instead of saying anything, the man stormed forward. His sword swung back.

Garkinal looked around for something to shield himself. Heart pounding, he grabbed the casserole dish from the table. Before the heat seared his fingers, he flung it with all his might at the leader as he entered the dining room.

The dish shattered against the man’s chest, sending hunks of meat and vegetables in all direction. Some of it splattered across the white tablecloth and up against the ceiling.

The invader staggered back. “Shit!”

Garkinal flailed for Janis. “Get out!” he yelled, unable to look away. His hand smacked against plates and flatware. When he felt a butter knife, he grabbed it. “Get the kids out now!” he begged.

“Daddy!”

“Back door!” he screamed as he lurched forward.

The lead intruder shoved himself off the wall and charged forward. His sword swung to the side, whistling through the air.

Garkinal jerked back and then lunged forward. His own knife flashed out, but it was small and wooden. He had to lunge forward to cut at the man but missed by inches.

He didn’t see the invader’s left fist before it smashed into the side of his head. Stars exploded across his vision as he was thrown back. His feet skittered against the floor. He tried to catch the table with his free hand but missed.

His children’s screams still beat against the walls and his ears but he was dazed from the sudden attack to turn around.

Then sharp agony tore through his stomach. The hilt of the invader’s sword slammed against his gut as the end of the blade tore out his back.

The pain sapped all the strength out of Garkinal’s legs. He sank to the ground, only dimly aware of the invader twisting the blade hard and then ripping it out of his stomach. It was followed by the sensation of coils of rope being poured into his lap.

Blinking through the pain that nearly blinded him, Garkinal looked down to see his intestines poured out across his legs and the ground. Torrents of blood poured out from gaping wound in his stomach.

“Get the rats, I’ll deal with the mother,” ordered the lead invader.

Garkinal tried to pull himself up but his hands were numb and slick. He couldn't seem to get them to work. Helpless, he pawed at his seat but only left bloody footprints on his seat.

The invader snorted and walked around him. He pulled back one foot.

Garkinal knew the kick was coming. His body wouldn't move.

It caught his face and his nose and jaw cracked from the impact. Then his shoulder hit the ground. Unable to control himself, his body slumped face-first into the pile of his own organs and blood.

Garkinal's breath came out in a slow wheeze.

Out of his sight, he heard his daughter scream shrilly. Then a smack silenced her.

Tears burned in his eyes as he tried to push himself back to his feet. He had to save his family, he had to keep fighting.

His bloody fingers slipped but he didn't stop try.

The world grew darker.

The back of his throat tickled but he couldn't cough.

The sound of Falim sobbing grew louder.

"I got the boy," announced one of the invaders.

Later, it was Rain that let out an inhuman wail. She let out a scream as her footsteps rushed across ground. Then she was next to Garkinal. "Gar! Please, Couple, don't let him die!"

She tugged on his clothes but it felt like she was miles away.

He couldn't move.

Then she let out a shriek and jerked away.

"Listen, you stupid cow." It was the lead invader again. He spoke in a low, sharp voice. "You have a choice. You listen to directions and you and your littles get out alive. You

start screaming or fighting and you're going to join your husband in a shallow grave out back."

Garkinal's heart broke at the sound of his family in terror. He tried to move again but his body refused to listen.

"Obey and live," repeated the invader. "Make a choice right now or I cut your throat."

Rain sobbed and her body shook.

"Good. Now, this is what's going to happen. We need a place for the winter, nice and quiet with no surprises. You're going to be a good host. No warnings, no calling out to friends, no running away. Nothing that gives us away or I'm going to gut your children like a chicken."

Rain let out a gasping cry.

Garkinal cringed at the sound.

"Do you understand?"

"Y-Yes. Yes!"

"Come on." The man's voice faded. "Tell your children to behave. I need to clean up this mess but Cal is going to stay here and watch over you."

Rain's cries grew quieter.

Garkinal couldn't see her but he could imagine her shuffling to the other side of the dining room where the children were crying themselves. He wanted to do something but his body felt empty and drained.

He was dying.

"Get his feet, Rom."

Barely aware of his own body, Garkinal felt the sickening sensation of his limp body being dragged out the front door and across the porch. The fading part of his mind could still register the steps as they scraped his back and the thump as his head cracked against the stone path.

His murderers dragged him to the far end of the yard before dumping him by a tree. His head slammed against the trunk and a few black stars swamp across his vision.

“He’s still twitching, Barn.”

“He’ll be dead by morning. Grab the rest of his guts and pile them on top.”

“Really?”

“Suck it up and just get it done. You didn’t have a problem moving corpses at the bank.”

“That was—”

“Just do it. I’m going back inside.”

The man named Rom grumbled as he threw hot coils of Garkinal’s organs on his body. “So fucking disgusting. You better hope the animals eat you, but Cal’s going to clean this shit up tomorrow.”

He spat and then walked away, leaving Garkinal to die in the dark.

To his horror, he didn’t die alone. Pain rolled across his body and he felt more scared than he had in his entire life. But his fading thoughts were focused on his family. They were going to suffer because he couldn’t save them. He wasn’t good enough.

His lips moved as he tried to whisper a prayer. The noises didn’t come out but he imagined he was praying one last time.

Blessed are we in your grace.

A cold wind blew across his body, sending little spasms along the parts still dying.

Cherished are we that they grant us our daily bread.

A snowflake landed on his cheek.

Loved are we in your presence.

His thoughts were fading, drifting away into black spirals. Everything hurt.

Comforted are we in your embrace.

With his final thoughts, he pleaded to the Divine Couple with all his might. Please, let me save them. One more time for my family.

D. Moonfire

Chapter 2

Frozen Ropes

Only for terrible hatred and revenge will Death hesitate but for a moment.

—Gladston Kaber-Macnasis, *The Nature of the Living Dead*

Garkinal leaned to the side to lift his foot off the icy ground and lurch forward to move it. His hip didn't seem to work like it used to and he wasn't sure why. His step ended with a thud and he had to pause to remember how to move his other foot.

Around him, the world was filled with ice and snow. One bare foot crunched through the shell. He should have been cold, but he felt nothing as he dragged his ankle through the ice before tilting to the side to lift it again.

He was among the trees. He could tell that from the branches that smacked against his face and the bark that scraped his shoulders. Icy leaves clung to his face, half-blinding him.

Garkinal hesitated for a moment. It took another few steps before he stopped moving. His joints creaking, he looked up into the dark sky above him. Memories blew across his mind, howling and confusing. He remembered a sharp

blow in his belly. There was a moment when everything grew dark. But then he was walking again.

Deep inside, he felt something moving him. It was a desperate need to keep moving forward. He was answering a call but he couldn't hear any voice over his ragged thoughts and the wind whipping past him.

His body swayed as he yanked his other foot free of the ice. The shoe over his toes was cracked and ripped. How long was he in the dark? He didn't remember snow and ice when he died.

In the distance, he heard a whinny of a horse. All of his senses focused on the sound as it echoed against the trees. His entire body tensed as he rotated toward it. The need to move forward redoubled and his feet started to shuffle faster toward creature.

Garkinal didn't know why he was drawn toward the sound but it was irresistible. He had to move faster. He gripped the side of a nearby tree and pushed himself toward the demanding sound.

Something tugged on his other hand. He stopped and tried to make another step. When he couldn't, he glanced down to see what was stopping him. It was coils of ice-covered rope that had caught on a broken branch.

He groaned and tried to tug them free. When he couldn't, he shook his head and tried to drop them.

His fingers refused to relax their grip.

Confused, Garkinal peered down at his withered hand. The skin was thin and stretched over his bones. He could see rents in the flesh but no blood stained the opening. When he tightened his grip—the only thing he could do—visible tendons flexed.

Swinging his head, he traced the rope from where it was coiled around his hand. Two loops hung below his wrist

but the third curved back up and into a gaping wound in his stomach.

He wasn't holding rope, he was holding his own intestines.

He would have been disgusted but that part of him was long dead. Lifting his hand up, he snapped it down.

The coils of his frozen entrails twisted and moved on their own. They rolled over each other as they peeled off the end of the branch and hit the ground with a wet snap. When he pulled them closer, the ground underneath them was steaming as it cracked.

Turning back, he limped toward the sounds of the horse. He concentrated on each foot in front of the other. His organs tugged on the ground behind him, reminding him that he was long dead.

He crossed over a bubbling stream. His feet splashed into the water but he felt no pain from the icy temperature. He kept going. Behind him, his intestines dragged through the water and the sound of bubbling stopped instantly. When he turned around, he saw that the touch of his organs had frozen the stream solid.

He turned back and kept following the call.

Before he knew it, he was out in the middle of the road. His head rolled to the side as he looked down to see his family's horse pulled a wagon toward him.

He knew the wagon, he had built it.

He knew the woman driving. She was his wife at one point.

He knew the man next to her. He had killed Garkinal.

The urge to move grew stronger. He turned toward the wagon and shuffled toward it. His thoughts silenced as he focused on his murderer. Behind him, the coils of his intestines shifted and undulated, moving with the anger that rose inside him like an ice storm.

“What the hell? Run him over!” commanded his murderer as he jammed a knife against her.

Garkinal turned to face the horse.

Rain winched away from the blade.

“Now!”

She snapped her reins and the horse moved into a run.

Garkinal swayed to the side to move his foot. It crunched loudly as bones ground against each other. Underneath his bare feet, rocks cracked as they froze through and shattered.

The horse threw up its head and reared back in fear.

He swung his other hand forward, launching the coils of his frozen intestines toward his murderer. The ice-covered entrails snapped forward, curving to avoid the horse and his wife to wrap around the murderer’s neck.

Garkinal yanked his hand back and Barn was torn from his seat. His body bounced off the back of the horse before landing hard on the ground.

Fueled by Garkinal anger, his entrails wrapped around his arms and legs before dragging him closer.

Barn bellowed out in fear and anger.

Garkinal didn’t care. He pulled harder until Barn was at his feet. Reaching down, he wrapped his withered hand around the man’s neck and picked him off the ground.

Barn’s knife scraped against Garkinal’s ribs. The scrape rattled him but there was no pain. Only anger.

“You... hurt... my... family,” gasped Garkinal, his voice coming out in a moan of icy wind. His lips cracked as he stared at the writhing murderer.

Barn stabbed him again. Rapid thrusts scraped against bones and pierced long-death flesh. His eyes were wide as he cut blindly.

Garkinal squeezed down, both his hand and the intestines that answered to his will.

Barn's skin grew icy and started to crack. His breath came out in a cloud tinged with red. Then, his skin began to darken as blood vessels burst. His eyes grew cloudy and then stopped moving as icicles formed across his eyes.

Garkinal kept squeezing until the body in his grip was nothing more than a solid hunk of ice. Then he tossed it aside.

Barn's corpse shattered on the ground.

Garkinal looked at the broken remains impassively.

Then a cry in the distance caught his attention. It was Janis, his daughter, and the sound was distant but clear as if she was next to him. She was frightened. He didn't know where she was, he just knew he had to go to her. With a groan, he leaned to the side and lifted his foot.

"Gar?" Rain's voice stopped him. "Is that you?"

He stopped and slowly turned back, his eyes not really seeing. His memories filled in the gaps: of his wife in her beautiful dress the night he was killed, when he first met her in the general store, and the one time they were cross-country skiing.

She held her hand out. "I-Is that really you?"

Garkinal stared for a moment. His memories fighting in his mind. He didn't feel like the man who married her. He was obviously dead, killed by a murderer. "Not... any... more."

"It is you. H-How?"

He didn't really know how he was moving, or what had happened. The only thing he remembered was the last few moments of his life. "I prayed. The... Couple... answered. Maybe."

Tears sparkled in her eyes. "I'm sorry." She took a small step closer. "I'm so sorry."

Something in his frozen heart cracked. He reached out for her with his free hand. He thought about the countless

times they talked late into the night, the conversations over dinners, and all the times they spent with their children. “Did they... hurt you?”

She nodded and rubbed her shoulder. “They did. I did what I could to save the littles.”

He smiled as he reached out to touch her cheek.

Her tears stopped rolling down her cheek as they grew bright. Then they froze in place, each one glittering in the light. Her breath came out in a fog around his rotted wrist.

Garkinal brushed them away. They fell as snow.

He leaned back and managed to step back. “One more...”

His entrails slithered back into his grip in a tight coil. It was his weapon against the men who hurt him. He didn’t know how long he would last, but he knew the Couple would give him enough to finish the job. “time...”

The air around him grew icy. Ice crackled underneath his feet. “... for my family.”

Lurching to the side, he turned around and began to shuffle home. His children were in danger and he had to kill the men who had harmed them.

Chapter 3

One More Time

Blessed are we in your grace...

—Prayer to the Divine Couple

Time had no meaning for Garkinal as he shuffled past the wooden gate that he built years ago. He could have been walking for five minutes or an hour or even a day.

Behind him, he heard the crunch of Rain's feet and the squeak of the wagon. They were walking behind him in silence that was only punctuated by the occasional sob of his wife.

He wanted to look back but he didn't know how long he would still be moving. Could he risk seeing his wife one last time if it meant his children would suffer.

Garkinal kept his gaze locked on the front door of the small house. He had made it with Rain and her parents many years ago, all to prepare for the two children he could hear whimpering inside. A low moan ripped out of his throat in a cold wind.

He needed a strategy but his mind refused to think about anything other than bursting in the front door and attacking. The coils in his hands sifting and twisted with his

thoughts; he could feel the air growing colder with their movement.

A sob came from behind him. “Oh, Love,” she whispered. He couldn’t look back, he had to keep moving.

One foot after the other. He had to sway with every stop. Every stomp felt like it was more difficult than the last.

Then he reached the door. He tried to grab the handle but his body wasn’t working right. Instead, he slammed face first into it with a thud. Garkinal backed up and groaned. He failed for the latch, trying to get his icy fingers to pull the lever.

“L-Let me,” whispered Rain as she reached around him. Her body pressed against his. Heat burned his skin but it didn’t matter as he enjoyed the caress. As soon as she opened the door, she yanked her hand back.

Garkinal could only groan before he thudded into the house.

Compared to the icy air around him, the heat of the house caused the air to waver and fog. It poured out across the floor as he shuffled toward the dining room.

One of the invaders was sitting in Garkinal’s seat, as if he was the head of his family. He had his short sword strapped to his side but the weapon was sheathed. He was eating from a plate. He leaned back with a smile. “That you, Barn? You’re later than I expected. Did she finally—?”

The man stopped as his eyes opened.

Garkinal threw the ropes in his hands. They sailed down the hall and landed on the invader’s head and shoulders.

“What the—?”

Fueled by his rage, his intestines wrapped around the man’s face and squeezed down. The air rippled as the temperature dropped rapidly, coating his body with ice in seconds.

Garkinal continued to shuffle into the room as his entrails froze his victim.

“Cal!” bellowed Rom from out of sight. “Get out of—”

There was a thud and then Falim let out a cry.

“—way!”

Rage burned through Garkinal. He squeezed down on Cal’s neck as the room grew colder. He felt more than heard the crack of Cal’s neck snapping inside the flesh confines of his body.

A sword came down on Garkinal’s intestine, slicing it apart. Rom burst into sight as he rushed to his ally. “Cal!”

Cal’s body slammed face-first into his meal, then his head rolled to the side at an unnatural angle.

Rom turned around. He was a handsome man, if it wasn’t for the mask of rage on his face and the sword in his hand. His eyes stared at Garkinal for a moment, then widened. “What in the hell are you?”

Garkinal let out a groan and tried to summon his entrails. Only the part still connected to him responded. The rest of it was limp around the corpse’s body.

Rom didn’t wait for an answer. He raised his sword and charged with a yell.

Garkinal tried to lift his arm to block the blow but he was too slow.

The sharp edge slammed into his shoulder, snapping bone and rending rotting skin. Tendons snapped as his shoulder went limp. Rom followed the attack with a kick that caught Garkinal in the knee.

Garkinal fell. He tried to stop himself but his hands flailed helplessly before he crashed down to one knee. The impact jolted him but there was no pain.

Finally able to get his limbs working, he grabbed Rom by his belt and pulled himself up.

“Get off!” Rom slashed down with this sword, cutting and slicing into Garkinal’s shoulder and head.

Ice formed underneath Garkinal’s grip as he pulled himself up. Everything hurt but he had to finish. The short length of his entrails snapped around to envelop Rom. They pinned one arm against his chest.

Immediately, the bitter cold poured into the entry hall. Fog gathered around their feet and Rom’s body crackled with it.

Garkinal stared directly into the man’s face. “You... hurt my family.”

“I-I’m...” The words ended as Rom’s eyes and tongue froze into place. Soft cracks reverberated through his body as his heart gave one last beat before it was stilled forever.

Garkinal released Rom and the body thudded at his feet. He swayed for a moment as the rage poured out, leaving him with only foggy thoughts and a sense of the end. He shook his head and then shuffled over to his seat at the table.

In the dining room, Janis was helping Falim to his feet. They were both wearing their day-to-day clothes but even a brief look showed that they had bruises on their faces and they were moving stiffly.

His son gasped. “Janis!”

Garkinal swayed as he reached his chair. With a groan, he tried to pull Cal out of it.

Rain spoke up from behind him. “Kids, help your f-father.” Her voice cracked.

Janis and Falim didn’t move.

Rain came around. There were tears on her face as she tugged Cal aside, tilting the chair until it fell.

Garkinal tried to help but he couldn’t get his limbs to move. He was getting closer, freezing over now that his

family was safe. A smile crossed his lips, or at least he thought he was smiling.

Then Janis was there. Together, she and her mother pulled the corpse out of the chair and dropped it to the ground. Janis put the chair back on its feet and then yanked her hands away.

Garkinal sank into the chair. “Sorry.”

Falim was on his other hand. He looked frightened and Garkinal would have done anything to not cause his own children to fear him.

“Sorry.”

“No, no,” gasped Rain. “Don’t say that.”

He kept looking at his son. A profound sadness filled his heart as he realized he wasn’t going to last much longer. “I... I won’t see you grow up.”

Tears sparkled in Falim’s eyes. “D-Daddy?”

Garkinal tried to lift his hand but it wouldn’t work. The sword had cut through the tendons and that side of him was limp. He took a deep breath. “I need... you to grow up to be a good man. I can’t come back. Be honest, be faithful.”

Falim nodded, tears in his eyes.

It took all of Garkinal’s effort to swing his head to the other side to look at his daughter. “I... I will miss you.”

“Daddy...”

He tried to smile. “I will miss your beautiful smile and... seeing... you grow up to be a good woman. I wish I could, but... but... I’ll have to do it by the Couple’s side.”

TO his surprise, Janis rushed forward and hugged him. Her sobs shook his body.

He patted her head as he looked at his wife. “I’m—”

“I love you,” she said. She wiped the tears from her face. “I love you more than anything else. Don’t you ever forget it, Gar. Never, ever forget it.”

Garkinal managed a smile. “I will... always... love you.”

No one said anything for a long moment. Only the soft sobs and cries filled the dining room.

Garkinal's thoughts grew colder and darker.

Then, he realized he needed to do one more thing. He looked across the table and then sighed. "Blessed are we..."

Janis stiffened against his body.

"...in your grace."

Rain let out another cry.

"Cherished are we with... with..."

Falim pulled back his chair and sat down. "... with your gifts," he finished.

Garkinal smiled. "Loved..."

Janis and Rain went to their seat as they joined in the prayer.

"... are we in your presence."

"Comforted are we in your embrace."

"Surrendered are we by your commands."

"Thankful are we for your guidance."

Then silence. They looked at each other and then at him.

Garkinal knew the end had finally come. With his last thoughts, Garkinal lifted his head to the heavens. "Honored am I... for giving me one more time."

About D. Moonfire

D. Moonfire is the remarkable intersection of a computer nerd and a scientist. He inherited a desire for learning, endless curiosity, and a talent for being a polymath from both of his parents. Instead of focusing on a single genre, he writes stories and novels in many different settings ranging from fantasy to science fiction. He also throws in the occasional romance or forensics murder mystery to mix things up.

In addition to having a borderline unhealthy obsession with the written word, he is also a developer who loves to code as much as he loves writing.

He lives near Cedar Rapids, Iowa with his wife, numerous pet computers, and a pair of highly mobile things of the male variety.

You can see more work by D. Moonfire at his website at <https://d.moonfire.us/>. His fantasy world, Fedran, can be found at <https://fedran.com/>.

D. Moonfire

Fedran

Fedran is a world caught on the cusp of two great ages.

For centuries, the Crystal Age shaped society through the exploration of magic. Every creature had the ability to affect the world using talents and spells. The only limitation was imagination, will, and the inescapable rules of resonance. But as society grew more civilized, magic became less reliable and weaker.

When an unexpected epiphany seemingly breaks the laws of resonance, everything changed. Artifacts no longer exploded when exposed to spells, but only if they were wrapped in cocoons of steel and brass. The humble fire rune becomes the fuel for new devices, ones powered by steam and pressure. These machines herald the birth of a new age, the Industrial Age.

Now, the powers of the old age struggle against the onslaught of new technologies and an alien way of approaching magic. Either the world will adapt or it will be washed away in the relentless march of innovation.

To explore the world of Fedran, check out <https://fedran.com/>. There you'll find stories, novels, character write-ups and more.

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