

The Lamassu - Emily Diaz

2,584 years ago...

Stones crumble beneath my touch, the force of my blows makes this material dust. The sun continues to whip courses of its generous heat onto my body. The leather strap of my water sac that hangs around my neck, rubs against the wounds from the sun's recent attack. I pull back from the creation to ease my craning back and neck to sip the limited water I have. The water has small grains of sand within, but no matter how it may disturb my throat, it helps heal my ever-exhausting parched throat. I take a moment to enjoy the moments of aid the water brings me to admire my work. The hooves of the beast are completed and I look at the five hooves that are so alike and I can't seem to criticize them. The cut is so clean, no man or king can doubt they were done by me. As if I could resist to inflame my ego, my eyes climb up the strong legs that have the strength to bear such weight of this magnificent creation. I start to salivate as the appetite continues the trek of my creation and I almost bring the water sac to my chapped lips to ease this rolling hunger. As I wrestle with my urges to take another sip, I bring myself to look at what art is laid out for me to feast on. I notice Mattaki - one of my closest friends - banging his small chisel to carve heavy details beneath his touch. The chisel beats against the stone in an intriguing rhythm, that as I look closer, it's one of my favorites he makes.

"Another lioness, my friend?" My shadow that looms over him gives him a reason to turn.

His old and expressionless eyes greet mine and flicker, "Indeed. She is a popular request it seems."

I had just seen him work on a lioness on the other side of the palace just the other day, "Any inquiries, if I may ask?"

"None Ditanu. I simply do the task that keeps me busy." Pulling back from his work, he takes a longer pull of water than I would ever be comfortable doing on such a day like this.

"Busy?" I chuckle, "My friend, when are you not busy?" Mattaki has always been busy even as a young boy. His mother would commonly remark as to how much he would get done in a day. Of course, that would always get my mother's attention.

"Well," He rests on his haunches, "I like doing it and if you won't mind me asking, why aren't you busy?"

Mattaki asks always difficult questions, "I like to bathe in the sunlight."

Now he chuckles, “We don’t bathe in the sunlight! Look at us!” He raises his thin arm to the light and exaggerates his point, “We can barely swim in the sunlight!” His arm bears multiple breaks of his skins that bleed and have never properly healed. As if admitting to his pain out loud, his outreached arm falls and reaches back under my shadow.

I look up to the sky with a hand to shield my eyes from the mercy of her glorious light, and we still have many more hours until we are relieved from our duties of today. Mattiki isn’t wearing much cloth around his skin and I am soon to be done under the bearing light.

“My friend,” He brings his painful gaze to my own, “I don’t want to see you without these at all today, you understand?” I unwound the cloth I have out over my arms, as armor against this blistering heat, and I reach out to grasp his arms. I slowly wrap his arms to leave enough room to allow the skin to breathe and move, but not lose enough that they will fall.

“Thank you, Ditanu.” He gives me a smile and he reaches for his chisel, “Do you need any help? Anything at all? Those wings look a tad unfinished.”

I turn to see my work and attempt to see how it could be seen as unfinished, “What could you possibly mean?” I exclaimed.

“Well,” He takes his time coming up with his criticism, “The wings are... how do I put this kindly...too soft. These statues, Ditanu, are here to protect the palace and our people! These wings must be sharp to wear off the weary.” Mattiki reaches for his tools and stands on his feet, “You are lucky this is an easy fix.”

Mattiki charges towards my work with his chisel in his right hand and his ego swirling around his head. I reach him before he reaches my beast and I yank the chisel out of his hand. Mattiki looks at me with worry, “My friend, I am here to help.”

He reaches for his chisel but I pull it out of his reach, “I admire your generous heart, but you have it wrong.” Mattiki looks concerned, but I continue, “The wings have yet to see war, Mattiki.”

“What could you possibly mean by that?” The concern strengthened its variance on his face.

“We sculpt in the present, yes?” He slowly nods his head, “These stones were untouched before, waning for our touches to make them something more. We are molding our time into these stones.” The hues on his face lighten, “Mattiki, look around us! Everything we have is new! The columns over there,” I gesture to the hallways that are being made just a short distance away from us, “are not old and withered! They were put up just days ago!” I motioned to the temple around us, “This was not here when we were boys! This was vacant land!” I take his hands, “The tools are new to our hands, these conditions are new to us, the wounds we have are fresh!” I calm myself and gently ask, “Now, why do you think these wings are soft?”

I silently hope he is getting my message as he looks at the wings one more time, “They were just created. They have not seen war”

“Exactly!” I feel waves of relief coursing through me, “The wings are soft, yet when you feel them,” I take his hands and place them onto the stone, “They are steady.” I inhale a deep breath, “We haven’t given them war, but we have given them armour... to stay steady.”

Mattaki takes a deep breath as well, “You are wise, Ditanu.”

My ego flares up, yet again, but I reel it in as I continue, “Feel the details in the wings. Each feather engraved into stone, fit one into another to build a wing.”

Mattaki shares a sincere smile, “But does not bear the weight of stone.”

“I am not the only wise one here.” We share a hearty chuckle, and Mattakki continues down my river of thoughts,

“The legs divide the weight of the purpose amongst them. No particular one bearing more weight than another.” I nod my head, urging him to continue, “The hooves are not worn down as they have not trotted across much land.” This time he guides our hands to the front of this beast, “This is the most feared part of this being.”

I can’t help myself, “It mirrors such a similar resemblance to us.”

“The face of a man with the body of a beast. Simply us in a different form.” Mattaki continues his thought, “We fear it because it is almost betrayal of our own kind, to have such power for a mortal being teases our jealousy.”

“But we admire it, for its purpose is nothing compared to ours. We never created its purpose, no, but we did bring its purpose to this land, so that we may believe.”

“To believe in hope when all seems lost.” Mattaki replies.

“To have faith in those greater than ourselves to protect us.” I echo our thoughts.

“To be better than those who will never know us.” Mattaki finished.

We were never brought here to just sculpt art of our time, but sculpt the permanent purpose to remain in this time, on this land, for now, and even then. Though there will be thousands of its kind, this one in front of us, this Lamassu is brought to life by me.

176 years ago...

“Walker! I mean - Mr. Walker! Mr. Walker! I have great news!” I yell across the crowd that swarms around my employer.

Mr. Walker stops his charge to the north part of the site and turns his directions towards me, "Ahh John! Just the chap I was hoping to see." His tone is lathered in demeanor, "Where is my tent? I need to rest now."

Of course he can barely understand I came to him with a purpose. No matter, I can hardly believe I held back a scoff as he barely lifted a finger all day, "I'm so sorry, sir. There was an artifact being uncovered and we need to get it fully excavated and the tent -"

"Am I hearing excuses, boy?" he rudely interrupts. His unkempt ruly mustache starts to quiver with anger, "I really don't like to hear such words of whining."

In an attempt to sooth the bull before he brings down this house, "No sir, n-n-none at all." I stammer.

"I am glad to hear that, John." His quivering mustache relaxes and touches, but spits out more poisonous words, "Now, where is my tent?"

"Sir, the tent is right over there." I point to the outlandish, butter on bacon tent that hogs more land than five of the regular tents combined.

"I can't really see it." He squints, "You see, my spectacles are in the very tent you had moved without my permission." He sighs, "Usher me there, will you?"

Sinking into myself out of frustration, "Of course, sir. Right this way."

Mr. Walker places his stiff cane onto my shoulder like I am a horse for his bloody chariot. We continue to walk over jagged pieces of the Earth, raised and sink over the months of work done. I am sure to be careful as the fragile boned man behind me would be severely damaged by such a travesty.... I take a quick glance back to see the pig-headed man behind me to see his snout breathing in air he seems to own. Willing to earn a break for the costs of a man's bone, I change the route slightly, to aim for the divots and cracks between the ground. My shoes have evolved to the terrain, but Mr. Walker's has yet to introduce themselves with "filthy" Mother Earth. My strides grow longer to throw Mr. Walker off trail a bit, for this chubby little man can wease, puff and pout his way to his tent. For as long as I can get him to his tent and in a deep slumber, I can finally lead this site to its true victory. I can only dream to plunder this site to its full extent of possibilities. The riches wasted beneath the lack of architectural design to withstand the weathers and the years to come. Pfff, if these savages could have the source of all the gold and riches growing from their lands, they would've made a healthy profit! Mr. Walker had always said that the civilization that had made these towns had a better way of life. Like any old man, he is sickly wrong. These civilizations were rooted with disease and had no way of curing illnesses other than sacrificing their own animals to unworthy idols that call themselves gods. The British Empire is the truest empire this world has ever seen and for we

are the only ones who have yet to lose our treasures, if that's what you want to call these artifacts buried and demolished under our feet.

"John, would you care to slow down a tad? I'm beginning to break a sweat." I look around to see Mr. Walker took out a handkerchief and dabbed the sweat off of his brow.

"Of course, Mr. Walker." I slow down a bit, I want to keep this fat man exhausted to the best I can.

I see a crack - not a huge one, but enough - to trip my scuffling companion along. I actually slow my pace so that I can tease him to believe I care for his comfort. We are only about five yards away, a couple more steps...four yards away... three yards away... two yards away... it's close enough for me to prepare my stride. I lift my foot off the ground to place down for the other foot to follow.

Oof!!!

The pride in my step faltered my calculations. For it was naive to think my faith to nature would be enough to allow me to sin, but alas, I was condemned as the air had shot out of my lungs and my face was caked in a layer of filth.

Behind me, my employer exclaims, "Boy! I could've been injured!" His leash on my is freed, but before I could enjoy my freedom, "Now look at my shoes!"

His shoes had a thin layer of dust on them, but for him the pristine outfit he has worn this very day, it had thrown off his whole look. "I am sorry, sir. I had not seen the raised ledge." I lie so easily.

"Don't sell me a dog!!!" He barks, but before another word tumbles from his anger stricken throat, she comes.

Adelia: the angel of my dreams -the purity of her halo could not be dimmed by a thousand layers of dust, for her golden hair could not be infected by these unsavory conditions, and the layers that hide her body tease my eyes and loom over my head. She comes running out from the west side of the camp and hurries to her husband's side.

"Albert! Are you alright?" She caresses his face and seems to ignore the sweat that oozes from his little effort and his labored breathing. "You have caused me such a fright."

"Oh my caring wife, I am alright now. A simple trip is all it was." He smiles a smile that I crave to wear.

Her halo shines down to me, "Taylor! Are you alright, as well?"

I stand up in a sloppy manner as my steps falter, "Of course, miss." I catch Mr. Walker's eye, "As your husband said, a simple trip is all it was."

“I sure hope it was or else your name would’ve been forgotten, Albert.” She bats her eyelashes while she soothes his suit.

“What could you possibly mean, woman?” his confused gaze seems to humble him in Adelia’s eyes.

“My husband, you have found - as the locals call it - a lamb-bussoo.”

“A Lammassu!” his confused glare turns to a cheerful one as he pronounces the name correctly. He clears his throat, “Where did you hear of this news darling?” He covers his thick head with a quick lie, “I hadn’t made it official yet.”

She giggles lightly, “Humble man. I had heard of it’s discovery over that way.” She points to the direction I had run from to Mr. Walker originally.

With more energy than I had ever seen before, Mr. Walker takes Adelia’s hand and runs to the excavation, stealing my life away with every giggle and sequel she expels. I chase after them in hopes to catch them before they see what I had found. *Not him*. When I had finally caught up with them, he had already filihntied the purity of my find as Mr. Walker had cackled at the find and shot his arms in the air. He had filled the air around us with his lying victory - fooling everyone to believe or pretend for their job’s sake that he had found the Lamassu. The same people who had patted me on the back, hooting and hollering that I - the assistant - had found their master’s success, were surrounding me and polluting this formally celebrated air with his and their pollution. The pain had become too unbearable as he had kissed the hoof of the creation and turned to throw a kiss at my destined-to-be Adelia.

Mr. Walker has done it.

Mr. Walker has killed me.

Mr. Walker has taken my life, my love, and liberty.

Only later did I think to repay him, to rid my dues before I shall part and lose my soul. I had been sparked with the heat of life for only a moment to take what is mine before I had lost my light. I stormed out of my suffocating tent with my weapon in hand to the beginning of where it started. I almost had it all, but Albert Walker has taken a part of who I am with his wretched grasp and I intend to weaken his grip a bit. While the light still shined from the west, I traveled across the complete site to the home of flurry and excitement. The powdering hair fools screech loud enough for me to slip by the crowd unnoticed and to entire the crater that houses my revenge. I slide down deeper into the earth to retrieve a part of my soul. Once I have situated myself, I stand before a behemoth of what Mr. Walker’s has stolen from me and I storm to its strongest point and I obletterate it. I slam the chisel again and again ignoring the pain, ignoring the ringing in my ears, ignoring the wounds on my

heart opening up and bleeding all over the bloody statue. The chisel stops when I have taken what I don't want, but what I need. I take my rightful share out from the statue and into my arms. I take the same hoof Mr. Walker's filited for it is now my duty to keep it far away from him, for the pain he will feel is one that emulates my own.

This is mine and mine alone.

9 years ago...

"How many are viewing it now?" My voice booms over the technician's headset.

"Two hundred and forty six viewers sir." He trips over his words. *Good.*

I suck my air through my teeth, "That's not enough, Aadeel." I snap my hands around his puny arms, "Well, I suggest you change that soon." I squeeze his arms, "You understand, what will happen if you don't." I smile, "Your wife might lose some of her fingers - well more of them I should say." I chuckle as I release the shaking man.

"Y-yes s-sir." the technician's fingers skip and fly over the keyboard with such fury, I can almost see smoke bruning the keys as he types.

I can see the numbers piling up to thousands and I know today will be better than the last. As one of the fastest growing platforms right now, it is also the weakest. It's truly funny how much money it takes to keep the fortress upright, but paper can't fight against the wind, and they don't know that we are powering the fan to take it all down. With such weak infrastructure and lazy monitoring, I am able to get my weasels between the cracks of ads between Etsy shoppers and antique dealers desperate to find something good.

"Commander, it is ready now." Aadeel squeaks out of his little voice box.

"That's great to hear. Begin." I command the weasel.

He nods his head as he cues for the men in front of his station to bring in the goods. As the red light begins to brighten in just seconds, soldiers bring in the first option. The stone mask with engravings of various lengths demonstrates texture that imitates a curly beard and face; the nose protrudes the most as it gives more dimension to the piece over all; and the big eyes can be either closed or open depending on your preference. I cover Aadeel's light with my shadow and I see how the audience is reacting to our play. There are many viewers, but very little offers I see in the messages. All of the offers are cheap no less: I see four grand, a couple five grand, eight grand, but none of them are good enough.

“See if that user,” I point to the screen, “badguy@96, is willing to up the ante,” I lower my voice, “Don’t lose the sale.”

Aadeel begins to work on the user as more of my men bring in more opportunities for me. A couple stone dolls seem to be hitting the market this time of year; the Mother Goddess of fertility goddess is bringing in the same game; and the King Shalmaneser III statue is bringing in enough. I begin to notice the numbers are dropping significantly and I have yet to see any interest from my more popular customers. Sweat trickles down the back of my neck as my nerves suddenly hit after all this time. My panic and paranoia start to settle onto my shoulders holding me down when I'm trying to swim. Luckily, I know where to find my boat.

“We have waited long enough,” I growl at the technician, “Bring it in.”

“Sir, we have only been on a short while, I think it would be best-”

“Did I stutter? Do you offer your opinion before I have even wanted to confide in it? Do I take orders from you now?” My anger steamed and threatened to roll over.

“No sir.”

“Exactly!” I bring my hand down onto the desk, “Bring. It. In. Now!”

I could hear the sound of liquid gushing as the smell of urine greets my nose. I shouldn’t be Surprised, I tend to have that effect on most people. The men presenting the artifacts go off camera to retrieve the main piece - the piece I’ve worked harder to come by than any other artifact. I had heard through the vine of criminality of a missing part of a Lammasu that has been missing for over a hundred of years. Of course, someone had to know something, but no one has had initiative to tell the public or just anyone of the location. It just so happens that when one person’s children are on the line, information just seems to spill like oil at the Gulf - no matter how much you try to clean it up, there is still more to be found. The person who had the missing piece came by it as an heirloom of her great-grandfather who was an assistant archeologist under the command of Albert Walker. Her great-grandfather must’ve known of its importance, but like myself, saw opportunity. It takes a strong man to do such a thing and now I honor his contribution to my collection by selling it for me.

To sell it, on the other hand, is a bit more challenging to do so. You see, it is about marketing towards the right clients, to entice them with a missing piece - it gives such a rush of pride, it provides a feast for the ego. For many, it is not pretty and so bland, but when you show the most conniving clientele, it's showing them the golden bone for a rabid dog. Even though the missing piece is only a hoof, it had come from the fifth leg of a Lammasu - the final post to remain immobile and to disturb the eyes of normality with confusion and fear.

“Sir. We’ve got something.” Aadeel breaks my thoughts. *Of course we do.* “It’s from *the* client.”

I knew this would happen, “Offer?” I ask, willing to see how far this will go.

“1.3 million dollars, sir.” he reads.

“Make it 1.5 million, and we’ll set your wife free.” I offer.

Aadeel looks down at his computer with determination and shakes as he types the counter offer of 1.7 million. I think Aadeel is hoping for them to drop the price to his golden number as three haunting dots appear on the dark screen, but disappear. My fist clenches up in anticipation, as they reappear again only to form “Deal.”

“Congratulations Aadeel. You can go now.” I exclaim as I pick him out of his chair.

“Sir?” His voice quivering and questioning.

“I said, go.” I speak in a calm and quiet tone.

On wobbly legs, he begins to depart like a gazelle - light and weary. Unfortunately, he is in the lion’s den. I wave over my soldier and give him the nod. Seconds later, two richting pops meet the air and soon comes back my soldier with only a couple drops of blood dripping down his brow. He gives me a nod back and I end the bidding and thinking aloud, “Another great day.”

8 years ago...

“The museum will be closing in 10 minutes. Again, the museum will be closing in 10 minutes.”

I recognize the voice of Pat from the Admissions desk announcing the cherished end to this yet another day. It is almost like the dismissal bell at the end of the school day - if we weren’t professional here, I know it would be like the beginning of High School Musical 2. Papers thrown in the air, a possible musical number, and the astonishing choreography would be a nice change here in the British Museum. I nearly let my laughter slip out from my own joke, but I hold it as the lead curator of my department, Karina Hunter, passes by me.

“Ciara, what time are you leaving tonight?” She asks kindly.

“Well, I have to send some more emails to sponsors, write up the weekly report, inspect the artifacts and such. Boring stuff really.” I sigh deeply, “Another long night I think.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, sweetie.” She has such a maternal glow about her as she continues, “How about you take a break for a while?”

“Oh that’s not needed.” I assure her, “I fear I will lose my motivation if I get pulled away from more emails -”

“How about I give you an excuse to take a break?” She argues.

As a recovering procrastinator, I shouldn’t, but one slip up couldn’t hurt, “Depending on the excuse, you may take the stand.”

She laughs, “Yard Sale. Pizza” My eyes light up as she empazes this next bit, “On me.”

My eyes light up as a storm of grumbles swirl in my stomach as -like a toddler with sticky fingers - open and close my hands rapidly. Ignoring my lack of professionalism, she reaches into her satchel and pulls south £25 for me to go out and fetch our supper.

“Well I guess this is a pretty valid excuse for me to stop working for a bit, burnout is a pretty common occurrence of the overworked kind.” I explain as I rise from my desk.

“Exactly! I am only looking out for your health, love.” Karina gushes

We share a deep chuckle and I come to her side to ask: “Any particular requests?”

The sound of a door opens and smacks against the frame with a heavy smack. I turn my head to look, but she interrupts me, “No anchovies, darling.”

Her face reflects her on the inside - shaken up and fearful. She leans in for a hug and as I am in her grasp she whispers into my ear, “Don’t turn around. Just walk to the exit and give me some time.” Then she instructs, “Tap my back twice if you understand.”

With a hesitant hand, I tap twice on her back, “Good.” she comments, “Now, go get us some pizza.”

As per her instructions, I gather my bearings and I take one step forward. Again, another step and another as I pass the colossal lion statue, the two guardians of the gateway - the Lamassu (one completed and one missing a piece), and the obelisks set into the floor. I finally reach the door and hold in the power of curiosity in a vice-like grip because if I hadn’t it would’ve roamed free and shot for the moon. Leaving my morals in that roam, I open the door and I enter the next wing, and I run. I run to the opposite side of the floor and try to get to the stairs. My legs are burning as I don’t run too often and my heart pounds for my mental status and for my physical status - or lack of it really. Once I have gotten to the stairs and down, down, down I go - I had to stop to breathe and calm myself.

“In and out...in... and out...in...and out...” I chant aloud to myself.

As I calm myself down, I realize that I am running from the scene of a crime! Sure there are cameras dangling from every crevice of the building, but I could be the only witness! I could be the last witness of a murder! Wait! I would be the biggest suspect then! I am too young to be in jail! Panic continues to pulse even more like those Japanese tribal drums and become too loud for me to

not even hear myself think! Instead of being rationale about this, I use my fingers to clamp my nose and close my mouth and count to 10.

1....2....3....4....5...6....7....8....9....10

My heart rate is decreased quite a bit and, sure, I feel very dizzy, but I finally register what I have to do. I have to know what is going on.

With effort in my steps, I run up the stairs, bust open the door, and I sprint to where I hope I can witness something better than what my paranoia has painted for me. I get closer to the doors in which I had just come from only a few minutes ago and I shove my arms out with much force to see not a physical act being played out, but a more horrific one.

“Ciera! What are you doing here?” Kariana shouts.

“Who’s this one?” A booming masculine voice expels from a masked man a few feet behind Kariana.

“It’s no one. Just an employee.” She quickly states.

“Is that so? Well, come over here then.” the man ushers me to come closer

Fear is at the wheel and controls my feet with every step I am pushed more and more to this mysterious man. As I get closer, I can see the curly black beards peaking out from behind the masks and forearms as big as my legs and showing their deep rich complexion that tells me that they certainly aren’t from London. I can feel my hands tremble at my sides as the man clutches one of my arms and pulls me toward him. The odor around him and horrendous, but it’s obvious he doesn’t care about his hygiene as much as business.

“Look in the box, sweetheart.” he says insistently.

I dare to break the glare of this man and look down in this wooden crate - only about two meters in height and length - and to my dismay, I see the only thing that very little people used to know about. “It can’t be.” My voice barely above a whisper.

“Yes. It is. The missing piece of treasure in this whole building...” He says.

“The missing Lamassu hoof.” I finish.

“Someone knows their history.” He and the men around him chuckle.

I look at Kariana, “How? How could this be?” My voice begins to raise.

Like a mother she is, she taunts at me, “Oh sweetie. Naive little Ciera.” She coriuches down to me, “Treasures are lost, but never forgotten. This museum is lucky for people like you, me and these gentleman.” She gets real close, “We can never forget.

“I am not a part of this!” I yell, pleading for my innocence.

“Now you see darling, you are wrong.” Kariana places her withered hand on my own, “You *are* the pulse for this heart, you *are* ebb and flow of the sea, more importantly, you are the thing that will keep this little treaty alive!” The hand squeezes hard onto my hand, “You understand?”

The lights seem to dim as I reply, “Yes ma’am.”