

Of Talons and Teeth

By Brent Baldwin

You should see the things Arana is drawing, Sayid. Elephants with eagle's wings, monkeys with mole's feet. They're amazing. And worrying. When you're released, we'll talk to her about them together, but for now I haven't the heart to tell her to stop. I've enclosed one of her pictures.

I took one of Arana's drawings to the lab and spliced together some of the gene sequences in the database. The creature is hideous, but it's the only thing that has made her laugh since you were taken. We'll see you next week, yes? I can't wait to show you what she has created.

You are so strong for us, Sayid. We miss you. I've been taking Arana to work to keep her distracted. Her drawings are getting more detailed, but she still refuses to write to you, saying you'll be home before the letters arrive. I pray five times a day that she's right.

Grandfather went to the market today, and he didn't come home. Uncle Marwan says he was arrested, but the local police don't have any record of it. I know you can't help us where you are, but if you can think of anyone that can, let us know. It's more likely you'll see him before we do. Tell him we love him, and to be strong. We love you, too.

It's been a month, Sayid. We need you. Please, if there's anyone else you can think of to plead your case... I know it's not fair of me to ask. I'm sorry. I've spoken to the imam and written to every politician I know, but no one is any help. We haven't forgotten you.

They're shelling the city. The rebels say it's the government. The radio says it's a few dissidents. We're supposed to stay at home, but we have no home left. If you find this note, come to the lab. We will watch for you.

Soldiers came to the lab and took Marwan and all the male assistants. I don't know what to do. I will work, I think. It keeps my mind off you for a little while. I... I shouldn't say that. I miss you so much.

Arana has taken interest in my work. To say she's precocious is to say that the desert is dry. You should see her work the gene splicer. Half the lab's incubators are full of her creations. Little tigers with crocodile mouths, little unicorns with dragon's wings. She calls them her menagerie, but they are the stuff of nightmares.

You aren't coming home. Neither is Grandfather or Marwan. I know it. You know it. Arana doesn't. I can't bear to tell our baby, Sayid. She needs her father, and what am I supposed to do? Lie to her? She has eyes. She has ears.

Everyone else has left. Or been taken. It's hard to say. I barely go outside. Arana has had a fever for a week, and I can't get it to come down.

You won't read these messages. I know that. But it makes me feel better to write them.
Arana is still sick. I finally ventured out. I had to.

Most of the soldiers were gone, and I don't think the ones that were left saw me. I went to the university clinic, but there was nothing inside but graffiti and broken glass. The city is dead. We shouldn't stay here, but where else can we go? We cannot leave. Not without you.

I'm watching my baby die, Sayid. Her skin is on fire. Her heart hammers faster than the machine gun fire outside the lab. Pray for her. Pray for us both.

Sayid. I love you. Our baby is... gone. There is no heat. No food. Only memories. I cling to the good ones.

I work the gene splicer alone now, trying to do something, anything to take my mind off what I've lost. I am out of protein stock, so I am experimenting on myself. I shouldn't, I know.

I am alive only because I am too much a coward to die.

Arana's creatures were horrid, nasty things. I am no different. Golden feathers cover my arms. My toes are like talons, fit to crush the world.

There are soldiers outside. Or rebels. There is no difference any longer. I don't know what they want, but the lab doors no longer lock.

I have nothing to fight them with except my talons and my teeth.

The lab is nothing but blood and rent flesh. Little of it is mine. My claws are sharp, my wings are strong. I am coming for you, Sayid.

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