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An Taim

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To control time- a great desire of man, but imagine, man having the ability to control time in its entirety!

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*“They’re called Benders, they’re very rare and only show up once ever hundred years.”* Her wide, wrinkly grin exposed her teeth that looked like perfect, yellowed pearls as she let out a small, excited chuckle.

She always told me it that way, like it was a secret just between her and me.

*“They can make time freeze whenever they want! Isn’t that amazing?”* She hugged me across the bed as I would smile back all big and nod.

*“Every hundred years, one of our clan, the Athrùs, is chosen; after seventeen years they will find out that they can make time run as fast or slow as they want to and then it’s all their responsibility to make sure that everyone’s time doesn’t get messed up. Sometimes-”*

I always loved that part, grandma would act all suspicious and act like it was even more top secret than the rest of the story.

*“-Sometimes the Bender that is chosen is a bad person (she’d say that part with all the drama she could muster while frowning in good spirits so it always made me giggle) and they try to control the universe!”* We would gasp together and then both start laughing hysterically.

It’s been a while since I’ve thought about Gram, she used to tell me that tale every night when I was a little girl. She would tell me that the Bender would become strongest at seventeen and once their power was in their control they could control time to suit their needs. If they were running late, they could slow time, if they were tired of waiting for something, they could speed it up, but that was risky business. Mostly because, sure, it was nice for the Bender, but what happens to everyone else when time is being mucked with?

I always thought it was a neat bedtime story. Nothing more. Just a bedtime story made up by my creative yet kooky old grandmother.

Lucky me- finding out it is actually the family history- the lore was known by my family alone. You won't find it in any commonplace myth nor history book. It was for us, only us, the Athrù clan, it literally translates to "Alter." Cute, ain't it?

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(About a year ago on my birthday I got a big surprise-)

"Gooood Morning, birthday girl!" mom's sing song voice roused me from sleeping.

I roll over with a moan, "Mother, I would be a lot happier if you let me sleep."

"Oh come on, sleepy head, it's time to greet the day. Make it yours!"

"Ug! Fiiine." My disgruntled moan is ignored as I grumble while stretching and mom leaves the room. The floor gives my bare toes an icy surprise as I roll out of bed and flip onto the floor, feet first. I crouch there and shake my head to wake up.

I hear Patsy Cline start crooning from below, followed closely by mom singing to me from downstairs- "Breakfast in fifteen minutes, Alana! You'd better be at the taaablee." *She was in nice timing with Patsy, Ha.*

How the hell is she such a morning person? I sigh and hoist myself up, grab some clothes, a towel, and head to the shower. The hot water hits my face and trickles down my chin and shoulders; I let out a sigh as I relish the sensation.

A foggy few minutes later I saunter into the kitchen, hair wrapped in a towel and that hot face meeting the cold air feeling that you get after a winter morning cleanse.

Mom smiles warmly at me, “Hi sweetheart, ready for some chow? Gotta start sweet seventeen off right.” She winks and places some eggs and bacon in front of me.

I smile back, “Thanks, ma.”

I finish my breakfast and as little chickadees out the window catch my attention, they’re chittering and puffing up is so cute as they sit on the porch rail. *What a perfect little existence, so simple. So-*

“Alana?”

She startles me back into the kitchen and I look around as if the room is foreign, a place always feels so weird when you re-enter it after being in your thoughts...

“Yeah, ma? What’s up?” I laze my eyes back out the window.

Mom comes over, putting her hand on my shoulder, “I said, are you alright.”

Her concerned eyes look over my face and my distant eyes find her gaze; she places the back of her hand to my forehead.

“Yeah, I’m fine, ma. I just wish there was more time to enjoy the small stuff- like sleep and showering. We’re always so rushed. We’ve always gotta be somewhere and doing something, ya know, the old sayings; not enough time for the day.” My breath noticeably escapes my lungs in an audible effort.

Mom is quiet, and that is very unlike her, so I look over to her to find her creepishly still. Like, she isn’t moving and is frozen in mid-movement. She isn’t moving, but looks like she was just about to. *Oh my go- What the hell- I- Mom?*

The music warbled into a slow, eerie deep Patsy voice to silence as it stopped slowly, too.

That’s not creepy.

“Mom?” I could barely hear myself.

(That was it- my big surprise-)

Barely a moment after I’d wished for more time, everything freezes. Well, sort of- it freezes for everyone and thing except me, or only for me. Oh I don’t know which! I still don’t really know how it works. Everything just kind of goes from normal to slow motion and then stops; everything just stops, clocks, people, animals, things being moved, steam from the tea pot, just everything.

Anyhow, when I finally guessed at what was going on I freaked out a bit, and the second I panic and wish everything was back to normal, mom continues right from where she left off.

“Oh honey, I know exactly how you feel, the days just seem so-”

“Mom?! Mom, what the hell just happened?!”

She looks at me with a startled expression, “excuse me?”

“MOM!?”

Her mouth clenches in a silenced line as her eyes widen and she slowly stops fiddling about the kitchen. “Honey?” Worry spreads over her pretty face, “What? What happened?”

“Are you freaking serious?! You didn’t notice that?! The whole roo-”

“Young Lady.” Her stern tone startles me and I jump in response. “There is no need to shout, now what in the blue blazes are you talking about?”

I stand up and fling my head over, scratching wildly at my hair through the towel and straighten up fussing with my damp hair and the towel. I sit back down, run my fingers through my hair and feel the cool air through my nose down my esophagus and watch my chest expand before I let out the deep breath.

Her eyes are on me and she looks completely baffled.

One more deep breath ensures I’m really awake and here. *Okay.*

“Okay, mom, I’m sorry for shouting (*even though I had every right*). But- do you mean to tell me, you don’t remember what just happened?”

Mom arches one eyebrow and kind of smiles, “alright, Alana, you’ve had your fun, now why don’t you go an-”

“MOM! I’m serious.”

Her hip cocks as she thuds both hands onto the counter and looks at me as though I’ve just insulted the Dali Lama or something.

“Alana, this isn’t funny.”

“I’m not being funny, ma. I swear. One second we were talking and then the next you weren’t answering me and you were just frozen or something. You just just weren’t moving.” I realized how desperate I sounded just then, *Oh, Lord, she doesn’t believe me.*

I looked at her, biting my lip as the center of my eyebrows creased into a plea; her face softened from stern back to concern as she unset her jaw and she hesitated.

Oh gosh, mom PLEASE say something. My breath felt hard to swallow as I searched her over with my eyes.

“Alana, you promise you’re not being funny?”

“YES, oh Lord, yes, mama, I swear.”

I could see her chest heave in a sigh as she moved to join me at the table. She took my hand in hers.

“It’s been a long time since anyone’s experienced frozen time in our family... Was anything else moving while I was still?”

I breathe out as warm prickles rush over me. *Praise Jesus she believes me!* I am so excited to have her trust I could just explode.

“No, ma, everything was still as stone, even the music went quiet!”

“Oh,” she pulls me into her and I embrace her hugs, I feel small, like a baby again.

“Alana, do you remember that story grandma used to tell you before bed?”

Looking up at her with a faint smile, “Of course.”

“I’m afraid- well, it’s not just a story, sweetie.”

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Yeah, that was a year ago. Talk about a totally unexpected birthday surprise. It’s really trippy, I’m actually starting to understand how it work and all, being able to control it. I’ve got to be really careful with “what I wish for” as the old saying goes, haha.

If I wish I had more time, as I did that morning, I get it. It scared the hell out of me for the first few months, definitely not something you get used to quickly. Although, the speeding time up bit is even scarier. It actually happened later that day. Ha! Hell of a birthday, that one.

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The clock always seem to move so much slower when you want to go home and it's the last hour of your day. I look at the clock what seems to be every five minutes, and only one will have passed. A moan passes out of my voicebox and into the ethers of home room. *Why do they call it home room when we all have to be here at the end of the day too?*

“Hey Alana, I heard it was your birthday!”

Ooof course you did. The voice belongs to the student body's self-proclaimed busy body, Nancy Roberts. She's the most obnoxious being I've ever met I swear, but I fake nice anyhow.

After plastering a big, fake, grin on, I turn towards her. “Yeah, Nancy, it is, actually. I'm seventeen now.”

“OH! How exciting! Happy Birthday! You'll, like, be legal next year! Then you can smoke, Oh I can't wait to smoke, I'll look just like Greta Garbo!”

“Thanks, Nancy.” I roll my eyes and turn back around, she wasn’t shutting up anytime soon. I look at the clock again, and again only a few minutes have gone by since last time. I wish for the time to go faster and the next thing I know-

The room is a blur and everyone seems to be talking loudly all at the same time. Color whizzes by me and everything starts to spin and abruptly stops as the school bell rings out over everyone followed by silence and darkness. I realize I’d clenched my eyes shut, and then slowly peek them open. *What the frick was that? Did I do that? Again?*

“...then Mary and Bobby were caught kissing in the boys locker room supply cabinet! Can you believe it?” She laughs and flips that perfectly waved blonde, flouncy hair of hers as she gathers her belongings. “Anyhow, I’d better get going, I hope you enjoy your birthday, Lana! Bye!”

Lord, if someone could bottle her nervous energy, they’d be set for eternity.

A sigh escapes me as I get up to leave. *Finally.*

I was only excited about another year because that meant I was almost done with this place, and these people. High school. Yeah, we all hate it, but I have never felt I fit in in any grade. I guess now I know why.

The skin beside my mouth moved to the side and up, exposing my teeth in a wide smile. Mom was pulling up and I waved to her. Time to go home. *At last.*

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Mom's been the only one getting me through all this. The year's been crazy with discovering I'm a Bender and all. I don't know what I'd do without her, she's been there for me the whole time. I can always talk to her, she's my best friend. A dotting, old-fashioned, diner-talking, best friend and I wouldn't change a thing about her.

It's pretty wonderful when you know there's that one person that will always be there when you need an ear or a shoulder, and that they'll never judge you and keep all your secrets. I know it's rare to find a mom and daughter who get along so well, but I think my discovery that year brought us closer than ever.

So, yeah, I'm facing this crazy power and worry about disrupting the space-time continuum or whatever, fighting calling myself a freak; but no matter what I know I'll get through it, I have ma. She's my way through this.

My name's Alana Arthù, I'm a time Bender. I could put the whole universe out of whack, and I'm just a teenage girl that can't wait to move on and find out where life leads me. My mom's my best friend, and I just want to let you all know that you're just lucky to be having to deal with normal problems. Don't take it for granted.