



# KIBURE

The sun cast a warm, comforting blanket over Kibure’s shirtless back as he leaned over to place a seed within the line of freshly tilled earth. “This will do nicely now won’t it?”

Beside him, a raaven’s coo answered excitedly and he smiled. Standing, he took the damp towel from his waist, ringing some of the cool water onto his forehead. It traveled along the surface of his skin, soothing the aches and pains of labor as it did.

He glanced over to his home, a modest, single-roomed structure sitting alone between two fields—no, one field, while the other side nestled alongside a beautiful, lush forest filled with singing birds and plenty of game for Rave to capture. The fact that this had changed before his eyes in an instant did not seem at all strange to Kibure. Nothing was amiss. He took up his wool sack of seeds and returned to work, content to live out his days without a bother in the world. No one to please or displease; it was just Kibure and Rave and their ability to subsist.

A nearby voice challenged the idea that he was alone. *Who is that?* he wondered.

“I said, are you expecting rain soon? Don’t tell me you’ve gone deaf.”

Kibure looked up to see his old friend, Tenkoran, more muscular than he remembered, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. *Ah, yes, of course Tenk lives on the adjacent farm. How could I forget?*

Kibure didn't stand, but he felt a sudden drop in temperature at the mention of rain. "Yes, I suppose it will probably rain this very evening." He looked behind him at a vast field of tilled soil. "I've just enough time to finish this last row. How goes the planting of your own fields?"

Tenk, confident as ever, replied, "Oh, I finished weeks ago. Just enjoying the view from beneath the shade of my favorite tree, watching it grow. Woulda come over here to help, but I know how much you prefer the fruits of your own labor. Couldn't rob you of that."

"That's mighty kind of you," said Kibure, sincerely.  
"Sure is."

Time passed, a moment, an hour. Who could say? But Tenk finally said, "Say, how'd we end up here anyhow?"

Kibure was confused by the question. "I—dunno." He really didn't. He didn't know that there was supposed to have been a path leading to this place, a story about how he'd arrived at this farm. He was just...here. That was all he knew, and that was all he wanted to know.

But Tenkoran was not satisfied with this answer. "But it doesn't make sense, does it? You're just a measly slave. So am I. We don't deserve this. We deserve nothing less than the flame and an eternal gnashing of teeth."

Kibure looked up at Tenk. Something had changed. Something in the tone had shifted and Kibure sensed the wrongness in his words. Rave did too for his next coo was one of warning. Before Kibure's very eyes, Tenk's face and body melted

into something entirely different. His arms grew, as did his chest and legs. His wool trousers became silky red and extended up to his neck as sleeves grew to cover the muscular Lugienese man. The transformation continued as deep red scales covered his face and neck. Kibure imagined that these continued elsewhere but the red robe concealed the rest.

Dread fully replaced serenity. Kibure started backing away. This was no longer his friend. The God-king laughed, a throaty grinding sound like distant thunder and Kibure felt the ground beneath his feet shake with each syllable.

Kibure stumbled back. “What do you want?” His voice came out weak, barely audible amidst the storm of Magog’s presence.

The God-king continued to chuckle, then finally said, “No need to fear, little one. I can’t hurt you. Not in this place.” He looked from side to side. “But I’ll be seeing you in the flesh soon enough. I just hope you advance enough in your skills to at least make our meeting...interesting. You have been blessed with the potential to wield great power, you know. Not enough to defeat me of course, but you have your role to play.”

Kibure shook his head, no. “You’re not here.”

Magog’s laughter returned.

Kibure said it again, louder so as to not be drowned out by the God-king. “You’re not here!”

The God-king tilted his head back and his laughter shook even the sky, which was being swallowed by the shadows of a great storm.

Kibure was terrified, but he was also angry. This was *his* dream, wasn’t it? His hands made fists and his body filled with warmth. This is MY dream. He lifted his hands and shouted “GET! OUT!”

Everything went still, and Magog stopped his laughter. His chin tilted down and he brought his deep, bottomless eyes to meet Kibure's own. He sneered and nodded just before he and the rest of the storm winked out of sight.

Kibure felt weak and his legs collapsed beneath him. He melted into the soil below, tears streaking his cheeks before dropping to stain the earth at his feet as he too faded from this place, from his dream, from his nightmare.