

JUNES

BIRTH

A short from The Violents

William

William Georgian was about to be a father. He knew that, not only by the way his wife's bulging belly had come to take up the majority of their small bed, or by the way she strained to walk down the hall and held some resemblance to a penguin, but also by the way he felt. Something had shifted in him these last weeks. He suddenly felt the need to help tidy the house. The need to build cradles, and to whittle little birds for their babe to play with. The need to be present. He knew this wasn't normal for men, and the jury was still out on how he felt about the screams and strange smells that would fill their small home, but he couldn't deny that Helen's excitement over the expected cuddles, tiny fingers and toes, and little yawns was contagious.

This evening, he was painting the nursery that would soon house a bouncing baby boy, or girl. He bent down and set the paintbrush on top of the tin, wiping his paint splattered hand on his coveralls and looked up at the wall with a grin on his face. The entire east wall of the room was bright and sunny now, and, judging by how the sunrise hit it every morning through the window above

the crib, he hoped it would light up like Apollo was greeting the family himself.

A small hand on his back made him smile wider, and he lifted his arm to let Helen under. She leaned into his side, and he pulled her in tight, kissing the top of her head and catching a curl in his mustache in the process. They laughed together before turning back to the wall.

"I love it." She declared. "It's like the sun threw up in here!"

"I'm glad you approve, Mama Georgian."

Helen looked up at him with shining eyes and he placed a hand on her belly, leaning down to kiss her gently on the lips.

"Will this room be blessed with the grace of your paint brushes?" William asked, and Helen swatted his arm.

"Don't be cheeky."

"I wasn't! I just think that the baby may enjoy some little animals along the baseboards when he, or she starts crawling."

Helen sighed and waddled to the dresser, bending to pick up a small dressing gown and folding it while she looked around the rest of the room. The Georgians were not rich by any means, and had saved everything possible

to give their new child a lavish nursery. Only the best crib, dresser, rugs, and rocker had come into the room.

Expensive paint, toys and clothes for the next few years, plus private school tuition had been paid ahead. William wanted to be sure that nothing could get in the way of their happiness.

"She can wait for a few animals, I'm sure, my love. I don't know about bending down there. And I want to do it properly. I already painted those canvases a few months back. Which you still need to hang up."

William grinned at Helen and moved to crouch on the floor at her feet. "While that is completely understandable, I still do not understand why you insist on calling the baby a girl. What if it comes out with male parts?"

Helen laughed and rocked back, placing her hands over her belly. "I'm not worried about that at all. I know this baby."

William rolled his eyes. Helen gave him a strained look and rolled her eyes back at him. He laughed in response and kissed the top of her stomach before beginning to hum an old tune, grabbing the arms of the chair and rocking her as she folded baby clothes.

They kept each other company around the house like this all evening, through folding clothing, cleaning the floors, washing the windows, and cooking dinner. All the way until they retired to bed together. And William loved every moment.



Helen

Helen woke with a start, her eyes snapping open to a dark ceiling. She lifted her hand to her brow and was shocked that it was drenched in sweat, and that her fingers were trembling. She wasn't sure what exactly had woken her, but this wasn't normal for her at all.

She decided a cup of tea may help. She didn't much like tea, but remembered her parents drinking it all day, every day when she was young. It was her mother's favorite sick remedy, especially while her family had been on the ship coming to America.

She clambered out of bed, careful not to disturb William's snoring form, and padded down the hallway to the kitchen. The kettle was new, shiny, and it made her

happy to finally use it, along with their barely touched China teacups as well.

As Helen waited for the kettle to boil, she thought back to her restless sleep, trying to remember what in the realms had woken her. She turned the stove off and poured the water into her cup, and as the steam hit her face, so did the memory.

Thick steam around a massive quartz tub cleared and Helen found herself sitting in deep water across from one of the most beautiful women she had ever seen. The breath caught in her throat and she opened her mouth to speak, but looked down and immediately snapped it shut. The crystal clear water bubbled up to her collarbone but under that, she was completely exposed, her breasts floating freely and bare belly out for the woman to see. As Helen moved to cover herself up, she looked up and saw that the woman was also in the same state - nude, and clearly *very* pregnant.

She pointed at the woman's stomach instead and cocked her head, and the woman smiled and held up two fingers before she began wading toward her. Helen blushed and tried to back up, but found her back pressed against the hard rock of the tub. Suddenly, the woman morphed into William, dressed in a nice navy pin-striped

suit. His hand was gray, cold, and hard as rock as it stroked Helen's cheek.

"Oh, my love. Our girl will be here tomorrow. And then the real adventure begins."

"What do you mean? What's wrong with you?"
Helen breathed.

William smiled, but no joy reached his eyes as he crushed her body to the side of the tub and leaned down. "Our child, and her child, and her child after that will know nothing but chaos. The realms lie on a precipice, balanced on a blades edge. History is due to repeat and it begins with this war. Many will die. Olympus will crumble. All will fall."

William reached out before she could think of what to say and gripped Helen's neck, his fingers wrapped around her throat like a marble vice. Everything in her vision went dark.

She gasped loudly and pulled her hand away from her own throat, trying to shove the memory down. Helen was not prone to nightmares and that had to be one of the worst that anyone had ever had. She leaned against the counter, comforted by the fact it didn't reach up her entire back, and sipped her tea quietly until the sun begin to rise.

As Apollo carried the first rays over the horizon, she wandered into the nursery and smiled at the golden wall. It was absolutely lit up like a personal sunrise, and William had done so well. But he was right that it needed something more. She ran to gather her paints, still thinking about her strange dream. As she painted little ducks along the baseboard, she reassured herself. William would never hurt her. In their three years together, he had never been anything but a gentle soul.



William

Helen had been strangely quiet all day, and he was shocked to see her nearly done painting the bottom half of the sunrise wall when he woke. She said she realized that she may not get the opportunity after the baby comes, but she was acting jumpy and on edge, and he wondered if perhaps something else may be going on. He tried not to pry too much, instead opting to make her breakfast and refresh her paint water quietly.

For the first time in his entire adult life, he took off work today. He just had a feeling it was right. He sent for

the midwives, then spent the afternoon resting with Helen. Now that the sun had set and moonlight was casting shadows of the tree outside his window, he simply couldn't sleep.

He laid behind his wife, body curled around hers and comforter tucked in tight around both of them. He watched the tree's cast dance on the wall, matching his breath to the gentle sway of the shadow, as the wind outside blew it back and forth.

As it picked up speed and the branches started to jerk around, he hoped the motion may lull him to sleep. But to no avail.

Just as he gave up and turned his attention instead to rubbing the small of Helen's back, she went stiff as a board and let out a moan.

"Helen?" he whispered into the dark.

Suddenly, she straightened, throwing her legs out straight, and let out a loud yelp followed by an even louder groan that wailed around the room. The wind outside grew louder again and buffeted the side of the house in response. William propped himself up, hovering over her for a moment, unsure if that meant it was time.

A near silent pop sounded from Helen's abdomen, immediately followed by a warm gush of liquid that

soaked into the mattress and covered his thigh. In an instant, he was on the move. Rushing about the room, while Helen laid in bed panting, he quickly grabbed the duffel bag that had been packed for him the previous week. The wind picked up speed as William busied himself, the sounds from outside seeming to echo his own.

The house began shaking as he leaned through the door and bellowed down the hall "Baby! Baby is coming!" as loudly as he could, hoping that the midwives could hear him over the howling wind and rain now spattering the windows. Moments later, two women rushed in. Wearing matching stiff white cotton dresses that fell below their knee, he wondered how they could move so quickly.

One of the women quickly went to Helen's side, while the other shooed him out of the room. He barely had time to grab his bag full of his personal, before the door was firmly shut in his face. He knew this was normal, being shoved away from his wife while she delivered their child, but he couldn't shake his feelings of unease. William stood in the hallway for a long while, mind racing. How he wished they were wealthy enough to afford a private hospital room. Although, midwives could handle this better than any doctor. Gods forbid someone hear him say that aloud. His heart leapt with every inhuman sound that

Helen released, and he forced his thoughts from her screams to the Gods above as he wandered to the living room, and he wondered if they would be watching over their growing family today. He hoped so, anyway.



Helen

Helen's abdomen felt as if it were being torn in two as she bore down over another contraction. She screamed as she pushed, and could barely hear the midwife called Alice cooing in her ear. She gripped Helen's hand and called over the howling winds.

"Push now with my count, 3,2,1 go. Now stop!"

Helen was forced to reel the urge back in as her body relaxed for barely a moment. She breathed deeply for less than thirty seconds before the whole process started again.

A tear fell from her eye and sweat beaded on her back and she wondered how women did this through history. She couldn't think of a worse experience to live through. Her mind detached and began to wander as her subconscious carried her through the birthing process. She

wondered if the child would come out alive. She'd heard stories of them dying. Or being born with tragic deformities. Perhaps that's what the dream was, just feeding on her fears.

The other midwife, Lauren, piped up from between her legs next. "Baby is coming! Just a bit further now Miss!"

This exclamation slammed Helen back into her body and her heart pattered quickly for a moment. Baby. She was about to meet her baby. Alice coached her through three more pushes and Lauren caught a pink bundle of squealing flesh and suddenly it was all over as quickly as it had begun.

Helen breathed heavily, tears pouring from her eyes and looked up at the ceiling. Between blinks, she almost swore that she could see the woman from her dreams floating above her with a smile on her face, holding her own babies in her arms. Her heart swelled for the moment she looked at them. She swore it was Leto, holding Apollo and Athena. Just like the paintings in church she saw as a child, they had a bright halo around them. The goddess had been watching over her. She knew that she would be okay, no matter what the future brought.



William

William laid on the couch in the sitting room, as far away as possible from the wails of his wife. The storm was somehow worse on this side of the house. The entire room shook, setting each one of William's nerves off each time a huge buffet smacked the outside of the wall opposite him. Trying to distract himself, he began to examine the room.

The couch he laid on pressed against the wall that bordered the kitchen, and was well loved from years of use. Covered in a soft blanket, you couldn't tell unless you took note of how the seat hugged you when you used it. A light colored rug took up the middle of the room, and a lounge chair sat to the left of it. William normally loved the large bay style window he now faced, set just next to the front door, but now the shadows dancing off of it scared him. He turned his attention the walls. Oh, he did love the walls. They were covered in Helen's paintings, each one large with broad strokes of color. They popped against their gold borders. He truly loved her art, and he hoped she never stopped painting.

Thinking about his wife's hobbies set him back into his spiral. He wondered if her brain would be the same after this birth, or if she would change terribly as his friend's wife had. He shuddered, thinking about that woman's eyes. She had the appearance of someone that had looked death in the face and given him her tongue. William shook the image from his brain. He hadn't been back to that friend's house for dinner since the first visit after his son was born. The lights flickered, interrupting his train of thought, and he began to wonder if it wasn't the gods watching over them, but some terrible monster that was going to eat their new child. Of course, that sounded silly, but with how the recent war had gone, he wouldn't be surprised if the gods had abandoned them all.

He pulled his blanket around him tighter and shivered, imagining a ten foot tall beast with red skin and four eyes picking up an infant and eating it. What was wrong with his imagination today! He forced his thoughts once again to the gods. Come on, he thought. Come and help make this better. As soon as the last word finished bouncing around his brain, the lights flickered once more and shut off. William froze, trying to listen over the deafening wind for sounds from his wife. After a moment, he rose and moved to look out of the window. Pulling the

heavy covering aside, he watched in shock as huge tree branches flew through the air. Waves of wind and rain crashed about, and the empty house across the road swayed violently. Just as he was about to drop the curtain, a large branch flew towards him. He watched, rooted to the floor, as the piece of tree taller than him and double his width came straight for him.

By some miracle, it stopped short. Both him, and the branch froze in time, he didn't blink as it turned sideways, and began to brush past slowly, instead heading for the open lot next-door. As the branch moved past, he caught a glimpse of a face in between the sheets of rain. It mimicked his shocked expression, stormy gray eyes swirling under wild hair in bright shades of an autumn leaf. Its muscled jaw dropped. Then, in a blink, both the branch and the face were gone.

He was focusing so intently that he didn't hear the shorter of the two midwives approach. She set a hand gingerly on his shoulder and Henry yelped, jumping a foot in the air and stumbling back.

"Good gods, woman!" he yelled, once he saw who had touched him.

She chuckled and told him to follow her, so he obeyed, setting the blanket down and wringing his hands

before tiptoeing through the dining room, down the hall, and to his bedroom door.

The midwife didn't hesitate as she swung the door wide and ushered him inside. Lying in the middle of their small bed was Helen, drenched in sweat and pallid in the face, holding a small bundle close. William stepped towards her slowly, jaw dropping. He placed a hand on the back of her neck, and was shocked by the heat emanating from her body. Leaning down, he looked at their new baby. A girl, the midwife said. And she was beautiful. With Helen's dark honey skin, and a full head of tight curls already, and it looked as though she would have his green eyes eventually, as they were a light blue now and blinking slowly at the ceiling. The baby cooed and gurgled and he smiled.

"Juniper" Helen whispered.

William nodded in agreement, and rubbed Helen's back. He was only allowed a few more moments before being ushered out of the room once again.