

Twisted Eternity
By Supernova

A commissioned work

Tight, interlocking trunks of bark twisted together, forming the tree-borne abode in which Malethor attempted to perfect his alchemical experimentation. Illuminated by the glowing, spherical lavender berries above his crafting table, the mage swirled a chartreuse mixture within the cylindrical glass flask inches from his violet eyes. Pursing his lips, watching the concoction turn a navy blue, he sighed in disappointment as it began to smoke. After tossing the mixture into the central trunk of the tree in which he worked, he couldn't help but feel a pang of disappointment.

Walking over to the side of the treehouse, one of the walls split open before him to reveal a window. Staring out into the glowing darkness of the woods, he couldn't help but love the supernatural beauty of Starlight Forest. Named for the ever-ripe glowing berries that hung from the trees, even a wise one could mistake the canopy for a cloudless night sky if one were looking upward from the twisting roots below.

Below. Where Eressa was.

His alchemical experiments deemed dangerous by the Council of Archmagi, Malethor was banished from concocting any potion within the capital walls. Still bitter about this decision, he could still somewhat understand their position given that he had arrived at the council chamber with his once jet black hair bleached a shocking metallic platinum with no way to reverse it, magical or no. Well, both that and the fact that he had fallen in love with an elf.

Pursing his lips, looking out into the night-time darkness below, he wondered where his love was at that exact moment. Despite his experimentation often, quite literally, blowing up in his face, Malethor had found himself incredibly fortunate to find Eressa. Elf-human relationships were rare and often looked down upon in both realms, but were not strictly against any written laws. The practice simply wasn't "done."

Eressa was a true beauty, even for an Elf. A loving expression colored Malethor's face as he leaned his elbow against the window frame and rested his head on his hand as he dreamed of her delicate facial features, her long sky-blue hair, and those foot-long pointed ears that twitched cutely whenever she heard something unexpected. Knowing she was out fetching supplies from the woods in which she had grown up, he constantly felt a longing for her in her absence. And a slight fear, for the woods at night were not without their own set of dangers.

In spite of the near-banishment, both Malethor and Eressa lived comfortably in their isolated home, a bulbous protrusion of magically-bent branches high in the leaves several miles from the nearest elf encampment. Eressa, with her intimate, native familiarity, would always be the one to venture out while Malethor remained cooped up fiddling with his various liquids. In

spite of the rarity of some of his required ingredients, Malethor knew he could count on Eressa to find everything and anything he needed.

In the rare instances where they'd have to venture out together as a party, the combination between Malethor's fire spells, boosted to an odd strength by his potions, and Eressa's skills with a bow, her aim true through her experience as a ranger, combined to form an astounding synergy. It was through battle that they came to know each other, felling small armies through use of a rain of fire arrows with their signature pink flame.

Having given her several vials filled with potions that, when added to fire, make the very pink flame they're known for, Malethor would constantly be on the lookout for a pink torch in the distance, as this was a sign that she was close to home. Squinting, Malethor pondered making a potion that enhanced his eyesight, able to see no such signs in the distance.

Sighing again, running his long fingers through his platinum hair, he turned his back and faced his alchemy stand. It looked almost to be the true essence of chaos. Twisting glass tubes, empty vials hung over still-burning flame, reagents both rare and mundane scattered about in disorganized bottles. Anxiety over the fact that he'd have to clean this mess up sort of overtook him, knowing that it'd distract him from his ultimate goal: The potion of eternal youth.

Knowing for a fact that his banishment would end if he could solve this problem, he spent years studying different recipes for healing potions from the realms of both elf and man. Though they were both still composed of roughly the same ingredients, Malethor knew that he just needed to combine and tweak some of the reagents to compose a formula that would "self-renew." In other words, the effects would automatically begin again once they wore off. One and done.

If he were successful, one could walk through fields of flame, breathe underwater, fall from great distances, and, of course, keep themselves from aging. Men would finally reach immortality, even more so than the elves were blessed with eons ago, given that they still had to both eat and drink. His name would be passed down through the ages. Who would remember the names of the Archmagi who banished him? No one.

A determination coursed through him as he ruminated upon the historical implications of his discovery. His heart pounded as he brought his gloved hands to his table. Sitting down on the uncomfortable wooden stool he'd used since he was a student, he clattered the vials together and organized them by reagent-type. Coagulants, incinerants, dyes. These shouldn't be bundled together!

Though his magic-specialty was in fire conjuration, which helped him light the burners for his concoctions through use of his staff, he still had a limited ability to move objects without touching them. Having an intricate shelf system in place lining the center trunk of the abode, Malethor decided that he may as well organize his reagents before Eressa arrived.

Placing the incinerants closest to the floor, as if they dropped they could start fires, he wondered if Eressa viewed him as a failure. Now obviously beginning to show age, with Eressa looking as beautiful and timeless as ever, he viewed himself with a more insecure light. Trying to view himself the way his lover did, he simply saw someone who was falling apart, soon to be dead, a mere side note in Eressa's life. The peculiar mage who tried and failed.

He froze as he was about to place the last coagulant in its shelf-slot.

Slowly turning his head back to the table, he pursed his lips. History? Passing names down? What use would any of that be if people would never die? If people would walk around for eternity just remembering things when they happened? The idea of a "generation" would be nearly irrelevant if everyone remained youthful!

No. He wouldn't do this to be remembered. He wouldn't do this to spite some old council members. He wouldn't even do it for fame. He'd do it for Eressa. So she wouldn't have to see him waste away in the curse of age.

Clinking down the two vials in their slots, he hustled over to the alchemy setup and unfurled his rune-scroll, stained with various potions and reagents. Scanning through the detailed scrawlings of alchemical formulae, Malethor knew for a fact that with a few strokes of the quill, he'd master self-renewal. Squinting his eyes, he attempted to find something, anything, that he may be overlooking.

Throwing his head back, he felt a sense of humiliation. Another day passed, another time he'd have to admit to Eressa that he made no progress.

A flutter buzzed past his ear. Quickly darting his eyes towards the sound, he saw an iridescent beetle land on the tip of one of the glass tubes that littered his table. Known to the elves as *chrysochus*. Known to him as an everlast beetle.

After lunging his hand and carefully capturing the shining beetle in his left hand, he gently unfurled his fingers and admired the tiny insect's green and red carapace.

His heart beamed. This is the key.

The everlast beetle was an uncommon find, but they only lived in areas where the elves called home. Staying true to their man-given namesake, these beetles possessed concentrated magic within their shells, both giving them immortality and making them a coveted snack for elfkind. Just one beetle may give the one who consumed it enhanced magic potency or eyesight.

Placing the creature in his small mortar, Malethor quickly swirled the pestle around, reducing the beetle to a fine, shining paste. Almost feeling guilty for killing an animal that may

have been alive at the dawn of time, he quickly sucked back those pitiful emotions as he stared at the beetle paste.

Scooping up a sample in a small spoon, he then performed a series of tests to determine if the alchemical composition was suitable for addition into his health potion.

Lighting up the burners, he again found himself swirling a bright chartreuse liquid before his eyes. Upon adding in a tiny dab of beetle paste, he grinned as he saw it stay the vile lime-green coloration.

Malethor grit his teeth.

The concoction in the vile darkened back to a deep navy blue, signifying that his experiment had failed. Leaving him with nothing but garbage. He felt his jaw quiver as he slowly shuffled to the center trunk of the tree-house.

Lifting up the vial, he noticed the deep blue color turn back to the chartreuse tint it was earlier. A renewal. A complete, natural renewal.

A sense of happiness burst through him, as if he were struck by lightning. He wanted to dance. He wanted to take Eressa and “have her” right in the abode’s hammock as soon as she returned.

Placing the chartreuse mixture on the table, he plopped back down into his stool, experiencing a child-like giddiness as he watched the chartreuse liquid turn to navy blue and quickly back to chartreuse. All on its own.

Tossing in several well-measured vials into the main flask, he found himself nearly shaking as he concocted the largest helping of this potion that he could. Now swirling an entire quart of green liquid in the largest flask he had, he took the entire mortar and dumped the rest of his beetle paste in the mixture. Though he knew he was going to need more paste later, he didn’t care, he was going to taste immortality and spend the rest of time with his beautiful elf-lover.

Swirling the potion, he saw it change color several times. Upon it reaching peak-chartreuse, he placed the flask up to his lips and chugged it as though he were a drunken Dwarf at an ale-house having his twelfth pint.

“Ahh!” He said, holding an empty flask.

Upon running up to the mirror, he couldn’t help but gasp. His signs of aging were no longer. The light wrinkles around his eyes were flattening out. His nose got just a little shorter. His eyes became just a little bit whiter. He blinked a few times. He looked like a lad of 20 years! It worked! Youth! Eternal youth!

Upon slamming the large flask down on the table itself, he jumped up and down like a school-boy, his excitement bursting in his chest. Until he stumbled.

Malethor grit his teeth as the world appeared as though it were spinning. The lavender berries above him looked as though they were growing brighter. Somehow... doubling?

He felt himself land on the ground with a thud. Perhaps experimenting on oneself wasn't the best idea.

Upon waking up, he felt the bark texture of the floor had changed. It seemed rougher; grittier. The air appeared heavier, as well. He had felt as though he were waking up after a night of irresponsible drinking. Staring at his arms, he gasped. His skin and, shockingly, his clothes, were the same color as the iridescent shell of that beetle!

Shaking his head, he felt his heart begin to pound. Turning one's hair platinum was one thing, but turning one's whole body splotched metallic green? He would never be allowed within town again! Standing up, he felt his heart sink.

Blurred with distance, he clearly saw the underside of his alchemy bench. In spite of the extraordinary circumstances, Malethor realized what deep trouble he was in, as the potion had not only imparted the color of the beetle upon him, but the size as well.

His heart thudding in his chest, he had no true plan for such a contingency. Though he had no idea whether the "Eternal youth" part of his potion was in effect, he would have to figure out how to grow back to his normal size! Were growth potions even possible? What of something that could change his color to the way it was? This was such a setback! Now he'd have to spend the rest of his life attempting to fix his mistakes, as opposed to reveling in discovery!

He felt a heat grow within his head. He couldn't help but grip his hair in his hands. "Fuck!" shouted Malethor, knowing that no one was there to hear such a taboo word.

A series of vibrations echoed under the bark floor. Almost sounding like an earthquake, Malethor turned his head towards the sealed entrance to the abode and saw it twist open, much as the window had done. Seeing a few long, spindly, pale fingers, Malethor felt a sense of relief wash over him. Eressa. He was saved.

In spite of this, he couldn't help but stare upwards in awe as he saw her titanic form climb into the tree-shaped structure. Falling backwards, he gasped several times. He had seen a mountain giant before, but they were but slow, lumbering creatures made of rock that survived by camouflaging with mountains. Eressa looked even more tremendous and the speed at which she moved was so incomprehensible to tiny Malethor that he felt a dull pain begin to grow under his forehead.

"Malethor, my dear. I have returned with a bountiful harvest! Though you will not believe what I have encountered!" Eressa nearly sang, in a mellifluous voice that, even at Malethor's tiny size, still made his heart flutter. "A wisp! A spirit of the forest! I only gazed upon its ghostly form for but a moment, but I am still partly blinded from its flash! I can barely see!"

She tilted her head, perked her ears up, and scanned the room.

"Malethor? You haven't traipsed into the dark wood, have you?" She said, more concernedly.

Spellbound by her beauty, he saw her pale skin barely covered by a light, nearly form-fitting cloth wrapping around her waist and breasts, serving very little for armor, but was light and gave a much freer range of motion. In bare feet, her blue hair hanging loose, he felt so entranced, he didn't move as he saw her bare feet slam into the wooden floor, heading right for him.

On both his hands and knees, he crawled as fast as he could, looking back every few strides to see her feet, long toes and all, peel off the brown floor and land with a crash. He was shocked to feel that her usual silent footsteps were causing such great commotion, even at this scale.

Missed by mere inches, he saw the bottom of her bare foot plop down right next to him. He grit his teeth and froze, feeling extraordinarily fortunate that he wasn't accidentally ground into Melethor paste.

As she continued stepping through the abode, she carried a burlap sack which he could tell were filled by various forest-berries. Smelling their sweet aroma wafting through the room, his mouth watered.

Now choking as he watched her continue a path around his alchemy table, he gasped again, hacking out gobs of hot saliva. "Ere-" he coughed, unable to speak. As she got closer, he noticed the burlap sack heading right for him.

He quickly put his arm up and felt the berry-filled bag slam upon him with great force. Though it didn't crush him, he felt a ringing in his head.

In a prone position, he could smell the heavenly aroma of the fruit waft through the bag. Blinking as he reached the light of the room, he saw the back of Eressa's legs as she stared out the very window he was leaning out of just moments before.

"Oh, Malethor... You have chosen quite an inopportune time to venture out into the wood on your lonesome..." Eressa mused.

The tiny mage didn't take her to be one who spoke to herself, feeling strange, almost as if he were spying on her.

"I can see very little under the light in our home! I would never be able to properly track you now!" She sighed as she turned around. "I can only hope that you come to your senses and retur-- Oh! Oh my! Good fortune!"

Eressa looked almost as though she made eye contact with Malethor. Staring into her bright blue eyes, he felt his anxiety melt away. She saw him.

The elf smiled widely, showing a row of perfectly white, flat teeth. "A *chrysochus*! What luck! Now I can seek Malethor once my eyesight returns!"

His heart dropping, he now understood he was in true danger. If he couldn't convince her that he was not an everlast beetle, and instead Malethor, he would be... He couldn't even think it!

He stood up and bolted around the burlap sack, almost immediately running out of breath. Stopping, he darted his head left and right, trying to find anywhere to hide, but there was none. The twisted nature of his elf-work abode meant no cracks, nor crevices he could hide behind. The magical construction was elegant and didn't leave room for any such spaces where dust could build.

A bead of sweat dropped down his cheek as he watched Eressa fast approach. As she leaned forward, she appeared as though she were an oceanic tidal wave, her arm darting as fast as an avalanche.

Pinched between her two fingers, it was as if time itself slowed down to a crawl. He looked down at her twisting fingerprints and attempted to free himself as a sensation of ascent exploded within his chest.

Now looking up at Eressa, his dearest love, he saw every detail in her face. Her sweet, pointed nose, her shapely jaw-line, her long, blue eyelashes. She was so gorgeous, it appeared as though her features were carved by the finest craftsmen.

Now gritting his teeth, he watched her lips part and felt his heart break. As he felt her warm, sweet breath waft over him, his perception of her shattered. She no longer looked as though she were a sweet-faced elf, she now appeared as though she were a monster. He couldn't imagine any turn of events could have spun to a less fortunate outcome.

Her pink lips framed the darkness as the humidity of her mouth clung to his metallic skin. Splashing on her wet, slimy tongue, he attempted to scream her name, but in complete fear, his words remained caught in his throat.

Inhaling a deep breath, filling his lungs with his love's berry-stained breath, he tried, yet again, to shout for her attention.

"Eres-"

A wet, slithering tongue pressed him up against her hard palate, smearing him between the taste buds and ripples of her mouth's roof. Now inundated with elf saliva, he choked, feeling it blast through his sinuses and out his nostrils. Tasting and smelling her familiar aroma, he couldn't help but experience a sensation of disgust. It was as if he were back at the tavern being lectured by a stupid Dwarf about how "Too much of a good thing is a bad thing, laddy."

Now flailing his arms, his concern turned to near panic as a cluster of slimy spit bubbles began to swarm over his wriggling body. His eyelids feeling heavy, he couldn't inhale due to her powerful tongue forcing the air from his lungs, causing his next breath to be a painful mixture of wet globs and humid breath.

Unable to do anything but cough, he hacked out another wad of spit as he felt a quick jolt forward. Now digging his fingers into the flat taste buds that lined the border between her tongue and throat, he felt as though his hope was quickly becoming foolish and irrelevant, sensing her fluids soak into his already-heavy clothes.

A fleshy ripple forced him even further forward behind the chamber sealed by her soft lips. His heart pounded so hard that it felt as though it was going to painfully burst from his chest in an explosion of blood. "At least then, she'd know she wasn't eating a mere beetle!" Thought Malethor, grimly.

Wanting to scream, he could sense her tongue's gentle caress over his tiny form, coating his body in her spit. The sensation of her taste buds was particularly revolting, as their touch perverted what should otherwise be a pleasant sensation in his mind. He thought back to all the times they locked lips, both before bed, and before battle. How he'd always long to feel her own tongue against his.

Now, this very tongue was dragging him to a doom his mind could not grasp. An urge to sob nearly overwhelmed him, but he steeled himself against such unmanly impulses.

A thunderously powerful pressure shot him forward like a firebolt launched from his staff. Both quick and painful, he could sense himself slid through the arch of his love's throat, quickly squeezed on all sides by the elfin tunnel leading to her forbidden depths.

Feeling too soft for how powerful the constriction was, the contradiction nearly shattering his sanity. Her tremendous heart now vibrating him to his bones, the magnitude of her immense body surrounding him in wet heat began melting a sense of hopelessness into his very soul.

As the rippling tunnel slid over him, his mind broke into a deep realization: He had been completely and utterly defeated. Gliding downwards, wrapped tightly by Eressa's esophagus, he contemplated the fact that he didn't truly have a future. His hopes now almost completely quashed, he was left with almost no mental space except for that which contemplates his own mortality.

A spark.

Mortality? Was that truly what he was facing? As a tight ring of flesh approached his face, a supreme sensation of doom lit up his mind like a wildfire. What if that immortality potion truly worked?

Eressa's hot sphincter split open, roughly spluttering tiny Malethor through its mucus-soaked hole. In spite of the physical disgust he was experiencing, his nostrils now full of the toxic fog rising from Eressa's stomach contents, Malethor felt a sense of numbness.

Falling into the bubbling, foamy vomit with a muffled plop, he couldn't help but feel ripped away from his contemplation as the sting of acid immediately burned his eyes. Hastily coated with the semi-sweet glop of whatever Eressa had consumed that day, Malethor jumped back in both shock and horror, attempting in vain to wipe any of the vile mass away.

Unable to feel the bottom of the oceanic chamber of slop, Malethor couldn't help but notice he could slowly wade through the seed-strewn mess of berries and roots. Sick with the knowledge that, if she consumed any meat at all, this would be a much more terrifying experience, he found himself slapped to the side of the snot-coated lining of her stomach.

Running his gloved hands against the warm, pulsing wrinkles that surrounded him on all sides, he attempted to pound. "Eressa! Please!" His heart had already shattered in hopelessness. He knew this was in vain. "Ere-" He coughed out several over-sized seeds, feeling a sense of pure revulsion, tasting the sour coating of the elf's vomit leaving a vile film over the inside of his mouth. Spitting out another wad of her hot puke, he felt his skin begin to soften as if he had stayed in a hot spring for too long.

Unable to see in the pitch darkness of Eressa's gut, he couldn't tell the physical state of his hands, and didn't know whether to be concerned or relieved at the health potion's seeming lack of efficacy. Now dragging his burning fingers across the lining of the elf's churning stomach, he could sense a fiery agony begin to build its way up from his toes, to his feet, to his ankles.

In spite of the growing pain, the nagging implication of his most recent concoction was still the most stinging aspect of this affair: If his self-renewing health potion truly worked, would that not mean he'd be digesting like this... forever?

No.

His mind sparked into an animalistic panic. Crashing his fists into the warm wall before him, he sensed that the only response Eressa gave was a slimy buildup of mucus along the stomach lining which he now pounded upon. A web of slime now connecting his arms to the rippling wall, he knew he'd have to grab her attention somehow. Not even the worst Hells concocted in the imagination of men could compare with an eternal imprisonment within a quicksand of burning slime. Now dragging his nails, feeling the mucus build up underneath, he grit his teeth in both fear and relief as he felt the nails break away into the churning soup of Eressa's digestion.

Yes. This torture wouldn't be eternal. There would be release.

Now laughing, both at his own folly and the absolute ridiculous nature of his demise, he attempted to scratch the wrinkly walls of flesh to break off all ten of his fingernails. Grinning in intense glee as he felt them peel away from the flesh of his fingertips, he understood that the sooner he'd break apart, the sooner he'd die. At least he'd become one with his love.

Now laughing maniacally, each pang of pain, each crack of his skin, each split of his lip felt like a catharsis. In spite of both his youth potion not working and his humiliating fate, he would not suffer an eternity. Never before had he been happy to fail on top of what was already a failure.

Having felt the last of his nails break away, he grit his teeth as his now hyper-sensitive skin began to truly soak in Eressa's acids. Still laughing, attempting to embrace his demise, he ran his fingers along his cheeks.

He felt eight scratches deeply slit themselves into his softened skin. The self-renewing potion worked. His nails were now back as they were just moments ago. Running his tongue, still tasting the acrid slurry that surrounded him, along his lips, they felt completely flawless, without any cracks.

"No! No! Please! Fuck! No!" He shouted as he felt his muscles give out in a reaction to pure despair.

Sinking deeply into the sea of Eressa's chunky vomit, he knew he had one last chance for release. Perhaps the potion worked, but in an incomplete way.

Having lost all sense of direction in the darkness, within the center of a mass of liquid, Malethor inhaled as deeply as he could, experiencing a flood of vomit fill his lungs.

This agony was of a different and much more severe flavor than any mere skin damage. The sense of drowning was a special kind of pain. One which lit every cell in his body aflame with the electric grip of mortal terror. Now having lost his sight, he had begun to lose senses he had once taken for granted. Senses that he didn't know existed. Malethor had no idea where his limbs started and where they ended, he had felt as though he melded with the bubbling fluid

around him. Though he knew he was still living in a corporeal body, his mind just recognized his existence as a sphere of pain in its purest form.

Now sinking to the bottom of the dark chamber, Malethor didn't even know if he was moving or not. The agony overrode any other sensations, the only relevant senses being touch, taste, and hearing, though all his ears gave him was a painful ringing.

Attempting to go limp, he had lost track of time within the soup. Just allowing Eressa's body to slide him wherever necessary, he experienced the first spark of hope since touching his love's tongue. The pain appeared to be fading away.

The regenerative effects of the potion appeared to strengthen his constitution, as well, stifling the drowning sensation that lit his nostrils aflame.

Still too in-despair to move, as the agony itself subsided, he could feel the fleshy chamber ripple and ooze him through another one of Eressa's holes: the stomach exit.

Somewhat learned in elf anatomy, both due to his education and his... experience with Eressa, he slid into the twisting labyrinth of her intestines knowing there was no exit. Elves, being quite literally magical, have no need for a waste disposal system. Their guts coil nearly endlessly through their abdomens, able to break down and absorb even the toughest fibers.

He'd hear Dwarves at the tavern joke about having never seen an elf go to the bathroom. Thinking them to be fools, Malethor knew why that was: It was because they literally did not.

The pain now faded, he found himself in near complete control of his limbs again. Now tortuously trapped in a thick log of partly digested plant matter, the peristaltic motion of Eressa's intestinal walls forced him forward. Embedded in this mass, he could feel the inside lining of her soft, slithering guts. Pushing against them as hard as he could, he found that they gave no give, instead giving him a strangely gentle caress, similar to her tongue.

Gurgling, bubbling noises echoed from every single direction. He understood he had sunk completely into the fleshy prison of his love. Knowing that the guts would coil possibly infinitely, he felt almost a delirious ecstasy as he attempted to make peace with his situation.

Knowing he had no chance of breaking free, he at least knew that he'd be spending the rest of his days, perhaps the rest of time even, with his love. Though this wasn't the way he intended upon going about this plan, he figured that this type of eternity wasn't truly the worst.

As the mass became smaller as he bent through corner after corner of her fleshy tubing, Malethor felt himself to be an ironic success. He had achieved what he had planned: To spend more time with Eressa through concocting his potion. He didn't care about history or his name being passed down. This, in a round-about way, was what he wanted to begin with. Sinking into

the diminishing glop as it magically absorbed into her flesh, he felt himself glided along her intestinal walls.

An infinite loop awaited him in his unique eternity. Twisting through her guts, the more he slid, the more at-peace he became.

After a night of frantic searching, Eressa had fallen to her knees within the tree-borne abode. Malethor was gone. Tears falling down her alabaster cheeks, she couldn't bear the uncertainty of his fate. Whether he ran off in shame or if he were consumed by some forest-beast, she shivered the same.

Covering her face with her palms, she wept. She knew he was on the verge of something truly great. Something that would help bind man and elfkind in a pact of friendship, much as they had been. Now that was possibly gone. Laying down on the bark-lined floor, Eressa continued to sob, clutching her fluttering gut.

As the weeks went on, Eressa felt, at least in a physical sense, greatly renewed and empowered. Always spending at least part of her day seeking her lost love, she was tortured by an anxious sensation, as if she knew he were near.

Whenever she felt this strange sensation, some uncanny internal flutter, her resolve was renewed, as she knew full-well he was close. Possibly right under her very nose.