I was created many years ago, a child of stone and cold. I was made upon the frozen peak of the mountain, and my first experience was drinking of the frozen waters, snow flowing all around me and dancing about my form. I am a child of ice, given form from the union of rock and water.

 I grew in form among the Aetherites of the peaks, being raised by many but still knowing who my mother and father were. It was there that I was given my identity and was taught the identity of my people. I was sculpted and formed into what I would become. I was taught the ways of my people, and they shall be with me forever.

 I was an inquisitive child that loved to learn. I adored the stories I heard, drinking of them like the earth drinks of the water, incorporating them into my very being. I worked hard, as was required, gaining a great deal of practical knowledge. Always changing, like the water, but ever forming new facets of myself, like the ice crystal, this was my childhood.

 But stories are just the past. Tales told are often those actions done by others long after they are gone, while others are great deeds having been done by those that are still with us. While important to remember and learn from, the stories you make for yourself are the most important, as those are the ones that define you. Though still the past, they are essential for your future.

 Once, I ventured deep into my mountain home and met a Stoneborn. I had heard tales of them and imagined what they must look like. Until I saw this one, I was wrong. Once I met this one I knew better. He told me to go away, and so I did, with not another word said between us. I never went back.

 I once met a Shar’vin who lived in the next mountain peak over. It was interesting. It knew more than me. It liked the fact that it knew more than me. It liked me for some strange reason. I stayed most of a day with it, and in the end do not know how much I like the Shar’vin. It was a day of interesting conversation, and I may have to return to that Shar’vin one day, but not anytime soon.

 I once spent a day with the old medicine man helping to make salves and potions to heal the sick and wounded among the clan. I mixed pastes, decanted liquids, and ground up herbs. I never really got the hang of it, and didn’t retain what I was being taught. I learned that day that it was not the path for me.

 I spent many a day in the valley where it was warmer. I was still cold and solid but the air and the sun were warm and dry. Grasses like I had never seen in the mountain villages grew everywhere and strange beasts of fur and claw lurked about. We killed a few and drove many others away while others went about collecting the roots and herbs needed to make medicines. Those were interesting days when I learned much through observation and testing.

 I spent many days among the people of the other villages, helping to trade for what was needed, and sharing stories and experiences with the others. I learned that I was not so different from the others that lived on the mountains. We were all of ice or stone, we were all alike, and yet each was as different as a snowflake.

 I spent many days with our Great Mother, learning the stories of our past. I drank deeply of this knowledge, filling my being and being satisfied. I could imagine the stories of old in my head and longed to hear more. When I visited the other clans I would often find time away from the business at hand to find their keeper of tales and sit with them, begging and trading for more. I knew that this was something I longed for.

 I spent few days on the south side of the mountains, for the winds were too soft and hot for my liking. I only spent time there in order to observe man and dwarf and elf as they passed, for they were strange creatures. Stoneborn and Shar’vin are similar enough to those of Ice and Earth to be familiar. Those of the flesh were strange and interesting. Our stories told little of them, and I yearned to learn more.

 It has now been several years since that one day, and only now can any look back at that transition from child to adult and see where it would take me. It was on that day that I asked our Elder to be allowed to follow the wagons of man and dwarf and elf to where they went, in order to learn much. It was on that day that I left my home and my family, putting behind me everything that I knew, and sought out the unknown. It was then end of a chapter in my story.

 I followed behind the wagons; not too close, and always out of site. I wanted to observe and not be questioned or attacked. I followed them through the plains out further than any of the clans had traveled. I followed them along the Pearl Road through the Lady’s Forest. There I saw many animals, stranger and larger than any I had dealt with on the plains. Though strange and frightening, I felt at home in the Lady’s embrace, though I never saw her. Who was I to expect to meet one of the great elements of legend, being still a young Aetherite with much to learn. Though I never saw her, I could feel her presence all around and it comforted me. It may be of interest to return to that place one day to see if any cousins of Earth reside within her embrace.

 I followed them and watched them pass through one of the great gateways and through the walls into the Ruby City. It appeared that this was the end of their journey as well as my own. I sat for hours, just taking in the site of such a massive place. Its size was unlike anything I had ever dreamed of, and much grander in both stature and appearance than any of the villages of the peaks. I knew not what to do next, nor what to expect, and so I contemplated my next actions carefully.

 Kishar, as I came to learn its name, was an oddity to me at the time. Why would any city need such large walls and as many guards at the entrances as I noted, unless it was constantly under threat of attack from some other force? Yet, I saw no evidence of a city besieged from without, which perplexed me even more. It also made it unknown to me as to how to gain entrance.

 I sat from a great distance and watched the walls of the city; all the while the sun continued its great journey through the sky. It was traveling on its downward arc towards the far city walls when I finally came to my conclusion. I had watch for much of the day as others of man and dwarf and elf traveled through the gates of the city. Guards would stop them in turn and then allow them to pass. No other great carts or wagons passed this way, so I came to conclude that if I were to walk to the gates, the guards may allow me to enter. Then again, there was always the possibility that they would consider me a monster, being unfamiliar with those of my kind, and would at best turn me away and at worse attack me. My thirst for knowledge was too great, and I resolved myself to taking that chance.

 I walked down the Pearl Road to what I would eventually learn is the Moon Gate. I was indeed stopped by the guards. I had expected a reaction of surprise or wonderment from them, but only received a rather unresponsive set of questions as to who I was, what my business was in Kishar, and how long I intended to stay. I answered them as best I could, and after a bit of inspection to ensure that I carried no weapons and intended no harm, they allowed me to pass.

 While I was amazed at the size of the city as viewed from the outside, I was left in awe once I finally entered the walls. This place was bigger than any I had ever seen, and the number of people moving about was overwhelming. Just the sight of some of the buildings up close left me in awe. I must have wandered about until the sun had almost set before I realized that I would need to find a place to stay for the night. I had heard of these places called Inns from listening to the conversations of man and dwarf and elf all those years, so I headed out to find one for the night.

 That first night was only the beginning of my strange learning process about the life in a big city and what man and dwarf and elf call civilized. They have this stuff they call money, and with my lack of any, I was turned away from every place I visited asking for a room for the night. Eventually I was directed to a shelter in a poor part of the city by a kindly old dwarf, and there I spent a fitful night. I did not dream that night, for it felt that my entire day had been but a dream.

 If my first day was a surprise look into the ways of man and dwarf and elf, my first week was a fast paced learning process as to what to expect from this place and its people. People were rude, unhelpful, disrespectful, haughty, full of hubris, and uncaring about the plight of others. People were also caring, compassionate, considerate, and helpful. There was a vast diversity here that I was not prepared for.

 My greatest find in that first few days was the harbor at the north end of town, and the waters of the great ocean. It was salty, and unlike any of the waters I had encountered before. It was vast, and stretched beyond my ability to perceive it. It was warmer than the frozen rains and snows of the mountains; even warmer than the small ponds of the plains. In all of its strangeness, it was and still is the only place that truly feels comforting to me. It almost feels like a second home. I have spent many a night in the embrace of that water just looking up at the stars and thinking.

 I had come to realize, in my travels throughout the city, that I did not seem altogether strange or out of place to the people that lived there. It was not for a few days that I could figure out why that was. One afternoon I had returned to the waters I loved so much, and it was there that I found a number of others of my kind. They were unlike the Aetherites I grew up with in the mountains. Their appearance, dress, manners, and even attitudes were vastly different. They were energetic and full of emotion, something I would not have attributed to those of water. It was also strange to see the others playing with them. Some appeared to be not but white wisps and swirls, though they were solid enough. Others appeared to be made of the lightning itself, crackling and popping but not harming any other they touched. These must have been the beings of Air that my brethren of Earth complained so much about.

 I spent several hours with them, learning about the Aetherites in the city, and made a few friends. One even offered to take me in for a while and help me find my way in the city. We talked, and I learned much from them. With this simple encounter, I felt more at home than ever before, which was good, because the next revelation would keep me in Kishar for a long time.

 I had met the waters and found contentment and a sense of comfort. I had found others of my kind and found sense of family. But, learning of the academy was what convinced me that I must stay. From all that I had heard, it was a vast repository of learning and knowledge, a place of stories and debates. It intrigued me.

 To my initial sadness, my brethren told me that Royal Academy was a place for the wealthy and noble to find their way in life, and that it was unattainable to those of low standing and station such as us. They also told me that I lacked the title or the money to attempt entry for even a brief amount of time. This was meant to deter me from my new goal, but it only served to inform me of what I needed to do next. I was nothing if not a being of great patience and stubborn determination, both traits I gained from my mother and father.

 I spent the next week seeking out information on and visiting every noble I could. Many sounded to be in possession of great title, and thus far out of my reach in terms of meeting and convincing to help me. Many I did try to introduce myself to were simply rude. Others had no need for me or my story, and cared not what it was that I wanted. But a few actually listened to me and my desire, but had neither the monetary means nor the political pull to gain me admission.

 I struggled and toiled in my labors, having been taught to persevere from a very young age, until I found myself in the Low District. It was there that I had a fateful meeting with Farzan Ardashir. I had only heard of this man in passing, and little was mentioned of his troubles, but he seemed receptive to my story. I had nothing really to offer him, so in exchange for his aid, both politically and monetarily, I offered my serviced to him in whatever capacity he required, for a period of time commensurate enough to compensate him for his trouble.

 I was wide eyed and naïve when I arrived for my first day at the Royal Academy. I had been trained to remember that the proper address for my new lord was Castellan, and that I was to refer to myself with the title Effendi. I knew not what that all meant at the time, but that was a greater lesson to be learned over the years.

 I had been told that my service would be in defense of my new lord, even though I had assumed my duties would hopefully be more scholarly in nature. I was of great surprise to me when I arrived and was informed that the majority of my training would be at the College of Battle. I had made a commitment, and honored my word. It was with a bit of sorrow that I went about my studies.

 Whenever possible, I would spend free hours in the Daihonsha, and try to convince my lord that such time was necessary to gain understanding of the laws and politics of Kishar so that I did not bring dishonor to his noble family and title. There were times when this worked, and there were times when finding even an hour away from my training and my duties as guard was most difficult. I still managed to learn a great deal about the history of the city, and those are still some of the most interesting stories I have read.

 Combat training was difficult, as I was barely used to holding a weapon, and even then I had only ever swung one to try and drive away wild animals. It took me a while, but I eventually got the hang of using a few of them.

 It was really my attunement to my element that benefited me the most. Many of the clan held some connection to their element, and could fashion and shape it in a way that man and dwarf and elf called magic. My connection soon landed me in classes to learn to become a Battlemage. I didn’t know it at the time, but it was a martial training that would include bits of the arcane arts, and was both interesting and stimulating mentally.

 Academy life was not uneventful, and I met many interesting people. Scholars were often interested about hearing by tales and learning about my people and our villages. I was careful about what I told them. Many of the nobles often treated me as if I were not there, or even worse, as competition to be beaten and ridiculed. I was never the best at what I did, and I’m sure I made a few enemies, but my intent was to learn and not get caught up in the petty squabbling and displays of power that the other nobles seemed content to use to show their standing in the greater order of things. I still don’t see the point to any of that, and mostly viewed it as a waste of time.

 It has been a few grueling years, and my training and studies are finally finished. I will now enter service. My time at the Royal Academy has been all too short, and I intend to find as much free time as I can to return and continue to read, to study, to hear the debates, and to learn. I have no idea what duties I will take on next, but now is when I must begin to repay my debt. My lord has done me a great favor, just by giving me title. So long as I serve and maintain that title, I have access to that which I seek. I know that other duties will limit my time in this place, but I will treasure every moment I can spend here.

 I have grown much and learned much in the last several years since leaving home. One day I may return to my village and share with them all that I have seen, heard, and learned. That may not be for a very long time, as my time of service has yet to be stipulated. But, I must remember that my lord is but a human, and the breath of his life is often small compared to that of the elements, and I was born of the elements of patience and perseverance.