

***When Winds Blow Cold***  
*A fairy tale*

By Anna Tan

Smashwords Edition  
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# I

He was a son of the sun, and the sun had made him old before his time. He stood half a head taller than his father, his body baked brown in the sun as he swam like a dolphin in the diamond sea. His black hair had bleached over the years, growing in a thick tangle that flopped over one eye. Laughter filled the fishing boat his father operated and the house his mother jealously guarded, mingling laugh lines with crow's feet at the corners of his eyes.

"Who would marry a twenty-year-old who looks like he's forty?" his mother grumbled as she waddled her way slowly around the table, heading to the kitchen sink.

"Don't worry, ma, I'll find someone," Danis replied with a smile.

"Oh, you try and see."

He thought her reply uncharacteristically pessimistic as he snuck a brown arm around her waist in a strong hug. "I'll see the matchmaker tomorrow."

She smiled back at him, but he was too distracted to notice the worry behind it.

Danis scrubbed himself clean early the next morning, taking special care to wash behind his ears and around his neckline and to scrub beneath his nails; things his mother had said every girl would be sure to notice instantly. He pulled on a smart new shirt, blue like the sea he loved, and freshly pressed slacks. He combed his hair, carefully tweaking out the snags, slipped on his shoes, and went into town.

~

Mother Yara looked up from her knitting as a dark stranger walked up to her doorstep. "What would you be looking for, my good sir?"

"Mother, I'm looking for a wife," Danis replied.

"At your age?" she tapped her lips thoughtfully. "Would a widow do?"

"At my age? But I'm only twenty," he said, kneeling so that his face was level with hers.

She peered at him, taking his chin in her grasp. "Twenty? Only three single girls in this town around that age and none of them would have you," she said.

"Why?"

Mother Yara pursed her lips and refused to elaborate. Instead, she instructed the man with skin like polished wood to sit on her porch whilst she went to call the girls.

He was sitting on the edge of the top stair, staring up into the sky, when the beauties of the town came to heed Mother's call, curious to see this new suitor she had found.

"But he is so old, Mother!" they exclaimed. "Surely, he isn't seeking for us."

"He is but twenty, or so he says," she replied, leaning on her walking stick.

"Surely he tricks you," one said, tossing her long black locks. "Look at those wrinkles!"

"Or he is mistaken," said the one with the pretty almond eyes. "His skin is dry and old."

The third merely smiled and walked away, the others following her lead.

Mother Yara took pity on Danis, his disappointment written clearly across his face. "If you do not mind someone older than you and a widow, Peony is a fine young woman, alone with a small child," she said, not unkindly.

"If she would have me," he said, a crack in his voice.

But Peony, standing at the gate of her house, a toddler of two clinging to her skirts, shook her head. "I don't need a man about the house," she said, her voice hard and grating, "much less one who looks like he would need my help to stay alive."

Nodding, Danis brushed aside Mother Yara's apologies and set his face to the north.

"If I can find no wife here, I will travel from town to town until I find one," he said resolutely. Not stopping to return home, he set off with nothing but the clothes on his back and a pack of freshly baked bread that Mother Yara pushed into his hands.

## II

The verdant forest hummed with life. Danis stopped and watched in awe as birds of bright colours flitted from branch to branch. He leaned against a large rock, listening to the stream that bubbled nearby. He wanted to plunge into the water, to hide his pain and disappointment in the hands that had held him all this time. He wanted to float on its waves until it led him back home.

“Why do you sigh so loudly, little human?” a voice of endless wells said softly into his ear.

Danis looked around sharply. “Who—who is that?”

The rock beside him moved. “Does it matter who I am before you answer my question?”

Danis scrambled away as a scaled head raised itself and a bright gold eye looked down at him.

“I suppose it does not, O Great Dragon,” Danis said, stammering. “I’m sorry, I didn’t realise I was leaning on you.”

“No. Most of you do not until I reveal myself,” the dragon said. “But you have yet to answer my question.”

“I sighed because I could not find a wife. None of them would have me.”

“And this wife is important to you, little one?”

“I suppose. Every man my age has one.”

“And what is this ‘wife’ that everyone has but you do not?”

“A wife... well, a wife would be my partner and my love. We would raise children together and—”

“Ah, you look for a mate!” The dragon looked ponderously upon him and Danis wondered if he was quite safe. “Why is there none for you in the town?”

“They say I am too old—or look too old, if there is a difference.”

“You? Old? You are but a fraction of my age and I too have yet to find a mate.”

“It is different with us. We do not live as long as your kind do.”

“Hm, I suppose so.”

A silence fell between them as the dragon continued to stare at the young man.

Danis nervously backed away a step at a time. “I apologise for disturbing your rest,” he said. “I will go now.”

“Wait.”

Danis looked up into the dragon's burning eye.

“Go north, little human. Go north until the winds blow cold and you walk on water. Go north, and there you will find her.” The dragon blinked once, twice, and then it spread its mighty wings and flew away with a mighty rush of wind, leaving Danis’ question floating unheard behind it: *Is that a prophecy?*

The forest was quiet now. Danis pulled his cloak around him, hugged his pack of bread, and continued on the road.

At every village and town he entered, Danis approached the matchmaker with a hopeful heart and a sunny smile, hoping that he had gone far enough north to find his wife. Yet at every stop, the young maidens looked upon him with scorn and derided him for his sun-kissed skin and his calloused hands whilst the older women accused him of being a rascal and a layabout, trying to find a woman to support his idleness.

After the tenth town, he stopped asking. Instead, he watched the faces of the women watching him and wondered why he was being treated so fearfully and harshly. He bought food where he could, counting his coin now, uncertain how long it would last. The weather grew colder as he walked further and his smart blue shirt, once pressed and new was now

dull, torn and dusty. His cloak no longer warmed him and he shivered as he walked. Yet his heart refused to let him return home.

Then one day, the winds blew and Danis shivered to his very bones, as first a fine layer of white powder coated him and then turned to water.

“The winds blow cold,” he muttered to himself through his tangled beard. “What the dragon spoke of is coming true.” A sliver of hope kindled in his heart and he held his head a little higher as he continued along the northern road.

~

He was cold and thin and starved by the time he reached the imposing gates of a city far in the north. The city guards scowled at him as he passed through.

“No begging at the houses,” one said sternly, holding on to Danis’ arm until he nodded in reply.

Danis shivered in the cold and wished for a new pair of shoes, for the slush on the ground soaked through the holes in his old shoes and he hadn’t the money left to buy a new pair. He thought wistfully of the sun, his friend, and the sea, his playmate, and wondered if he would ever see them again. He stopped beneath a nearby lamppost, grateful for the little scattered warmth, as he scanned the nearby buildings for an inn.

“What are you looking for?” a soft voice asked him.

He looked down at the tiny porcelain figure beside him. “Are you lost, child? Should you not be accompanied on a cold night like this?”

“Cold? In this fair weather?” Her pink lips curled in disdain, a dash of colour against her almost white skin. “And I am not a child. I am eighteen and need not be chaperoned by anyone.”

“Eighteen!” he exclaimed. “You don’t look it. I thought you were twelve.” He pulled his cloak tighter around him, shivering as the snow started to fall again.

“And how old are you?” she asked, her tone more curious than angry. “Are you very cold?”

“I’m twenty, and I’m freezing,” he said. “Do you know where I can stay the night?”

She reached out and took his hand. “Come, I’ll show you.”

They walked in silence, Danis struggling to catch his breath in the freezing air, the girl lost in her own thoughts. The arched gates appeared like a ghost in the dark and Danis stopped as she walked through them. She turned questioningly as she felt his hand slip out of hers.

“You’ll have frost bite soon if you don’t hurry,” she said. “Your clothes are not made for our weather.”

“But this is not an inn,” he said with some bewilderment. “It is a castle and the guards said not to beg—”

“You are not begging if I lead you in, are you?” she interrupted him. “It is my house and I do not wish for you to die on my doorstep.”

He followed her in past tall marble arches and thick stone walls to where the wind did not blow. He smiled his relief as his body warmed just a little. His fingers and toes began to thaw, warmth slowly creeping through his limbs and when she offered him a bowl of soup, it seemed to him hot and inviting, though there was no steam and it did not burn his throat or his tongue as he gulped it down.

“Who are you?” she finally asked when he put the bowl down.

“Danis of the Sun and Sea,” he replied. “And you?”

“Hana, Blossom of the Snow.”

“Thank you, Hana, for saving my life.”

“What’s a little wind?” she replied, but she blushed prettily.

She settled him into a comfortable chair lined with thick fur and Danis sunk into it gratefully. There was no fire in the building for Hana was a daughter of the winter and did not need fire to warm her.

“What are you doing here in my city?” she asked.

He started to reply but stopped, the weight of his disappointments and pain churning in his belly. “How is it your city?” he asked instead.

“My father rules here,” she replied. “But I see that you are tired. Perhaps we shall talk more tomorrow.”

Hana held out her hand to him, and he took it, letting her lead him through passages that sparkled in the lamp light and the clear floor that shimmered like water. A longing for the waves of his home overtook him and he blurted in his confusion, “What ground is this that we walk on? It shimmers like the sea and yet is hard and strong enough to stand on.”

“Our floors are laid with ice,” Hana replied.

“Ice? What is that?” He had heard of it before, he recalled, but he was too tired and too cold and too confused to try to remember the myths of his youth.

“Do you not have ice where you come from?” Hana asked in surprise. “It is water that has frozen.”

There was no time to ask more as she ushered him into a grandly furnished bedroom. In the middle of the room stood a four-poster bed covered with layers and layers of thick blankets and coverlets.

“I hope this will keep you warm through the night,” Hana said with some apprehension.

“It is more than enough, surely,” Danis said. He thanked her again as she left the room, closing the door behind her. He was nearly asleep, ensconced in a nest of coverings, when Hana's words drifted across his fading consciousness once more: *Our floors are laid with ice.*

### III

Danis woke with a start the next morning, the dragon's prophecy seared across brain. *Go north until the winds blow cold and you walk on water. Go north, and there you will find her.* He had walked on water—frozen water, at least—last night.

He got out of bed, shivering as the cold morning air struck his body afresh. Someone had opened the windows while he slept and draped new clothes, thick and sturdy, over the back of the chair at the dresser. Stumbling over to the dresser, he looked at himself in the mirror for the first time in months, startled at how haggard and decrepit he had become. Despair crept over him. Why would Hana, in her childlike beauty, want to marry an ugly old stranger? No—he would say nothing of his mission, but thank her for her kindness and leave for home.

There was a warm bath waiting for him in the adjoining bathroom; he looked around but could not find any hint of servants or any living person who could so anticipate his needs. A bath and a shave later, he almost felt like a new man. There was a knock on the door just as he finished combing his hair. The impeccable timing unnerved him; he looked around again to see if there was anyone watching him.

The knock came a second time and he sprang across the room to open the door.

“Father would like to meet you after breakfast,” Hana said without preamble.

Danis swallowed and nodded, bereft of words.

“Well, come along then. Breakfast is this way,” she said, taking him by the hand, as if he were a little child.

“Hana, I would like to thank you—”

“You will have to pass the tests, you know,” she interrupted him. “even if I do find you quite fascinating.”

“What tests?”

“The three trials to win my hand, of course. Isn’t that why you came?” she turned to study his face as they walked. “Didn’t you?” she asked a little more faintly, her white cheeks seeming, impossibly, to turn whiter.

“I came to find you but I didn’t know it would be you,” he said rather disjointedly. “A dragon I met on the road told me to go north.”

“The Dragon sent you to me!” she exclaimed, smiling again. “Then you will be the one!”

“How do you know it is the same dragon?”

“It has to be. The Dragon,” she said it as if it were his name, “prophesied a long time ago, before I was even born, about the breaking of my curse. If he sent you to me, then the time has come and you will pass the tests.”

“Will you tell me about the curse and the tests?” Danis asked as they sat down at a breakfast table covered with many different kinds of fruits and exotic-looking dishes.

“Maybe,” she said, shrugging. “Aren’t you going to eat anything first?”

Danis scanned through the many options, looking for the tell-tale steam of a freshly baked bun or maybe some hot soup. “Is there nothing hot at all? Why is everything cold?”

“This is how it has always been,” Hana answered.

A look of disappointment flashed across Danis’ face. He hid it as best as he could and slowly reached out for some fruit, but Hana had noticed his expression. She clapped her hands and the first servant Danis had seen in the building appeared.

“Tell him what you’d like,” she said.

Hesitantly, Danis requested for fish porridge. The servant bowed low and left. Danis and Hana sat at the table staring at each other over the lavish spread.

“Don’t you want to eat something?” Danis asked.

“I’ll wait,” Hana replied.

They sat in silence until the servant reappeared with a steaming bowl of fish porridge.

“Thank you,” Danis said. He savoured the saltiness of the broth, the heat of it cheering him. “It smells of my hometown, of the sea wind that used to blow through my hair. Ah, I miss my sea.”

“Is that what it smells like?” Hana asked with childlike wonder. “I’ve always wondered. That was the first test, by the way. We have not lit a fire to cook breakfast since I was born.”

“Have you never had this? Would you like to try some?” Danis offered her the bowl.

“Me? Eat something hot? I would melt,” she said.

“Why would you melt? Are you not flesh and blood like me? Taste it—it is good. See, I will blow on it to cool it for you so that you may partake of it,” he said, commencing to blow on a spoon full of porridge until Hana gathered enough courage to try the hot liquid.

“Oh, a fire! A fire in my belly,” she exclaimed as it trickled down her throat into her stomach. “A wonder it is! I feel warm from the inside out! You are a miracle, Danis of the Sun and Sea. There is truly none like you.”

Danis blushed. “But I did nothing at all, nothing but to urge you to try that which I love.”

“Tell me, Danis, do you have knowledge of the arts of magic? Have you woven a spell around this place?”

“No,” he replied. “But I feel as if this place itself is alive with magic.”

“There is only one final test, Danis of the Sun and Sea.”

“One? But you said there were three.”

A deep chuckle sounded out of nowhere. Danis froze, his hand still clasping his bowl, as a voice started to speak.

*So it was said: Know this, O King of the Winter. He must bring heat to your morning hearth. He must bring warmth to her inward parts. He must defeat the monster under your floor. The one who does this will lift the curse on your only daughter, Hana the ever young. They will live by the deep and bear you an heir for your throne. This is the prophecy of the Dragon.*

The deep voice fell silent. Danis twisted and turned looking for its source. “Who are you?” he asked in hushed tones.

*I am the King of the Winter, father of Hana the ever young, Blossom of the Snow.*

“Where are you?”

*I am here, in the bones of this castle, bound to it in life, bound to it by death, until my heir succeeds me. Have you come to set us free?*

“Are you a ghost?”

*You could call me that. You could call me anything you wish, but does it matter? You have passed the first two tests, tests that almost every young man in this kingdom has failed. How is it that you have done so?*

“I didn’t know it was a test. I just did what I would have done naturally.”

*And where do you come from, O dark one?*

“From a long way south,” Danis replied with a sigh. “From the land of everlasting sun, where the heat burns like a fire and strengthens your bones. I come from a place where we frolic in the crashing waves and laugh with the leaping dolphins.”

*And you will take my daughter far away to that place?*

“Only if you allow it, Sire,” Danis stammered, blushing again as he looked at Hana.

*Pass the test and you may.*

Danis waited but the King did not speak again. “What do I do now?” he asked Hana.

Wordlessly, she stood, taking his hand and leading him into a large hall. The walls were solid ice painted, or so it seemed, with murals of great sea monsters and crashing waves. He looked down and saw that beneath his feet were great depths, dark and gloomy, filled with caves and rocks.

“Defeat the monsters, Danis,” Hana said in a near whisper. “Come back to me alive.”

Her hand slipped out of his, leaving something hard in it. Danis opened his palm to see a clear crystal pendant on a fine filigree chain. He clasped it around his neck and looked up to see the door closing behind Hana, the outline of the door quickly fading into the murals. He stepped closer to inspect the vast paintings and began to notice the bodies— healthy young men caught in the jaws of great sea monsters, drowning in the depths, trying to race towards... the painting began to heave, the ice seeming to melt in an instant.

Instinctively, Danis held his breath as water—salty, cold, sea water— poured over him. Quickly, he cast off the layers of heavy furs he had draped on himself that morning. Kicking off his shoes, he let himself float upwards until his head bobbed above the waves. It was no good. He could barely see anything in the storm, and the large ship to his right seemed set to plough right into him, so he took a big gulp of air and dove back into the waters.

Unfamiliar waters could kill you, Danis knew. These weren't the waters he knew that were warm and inviting, that cradled you like you were in your mother's womb. These were cold, barren waters, where nightmares reigned.

And yet for all its foreignness, they were familiar nightmares. He propelled himself away from the melee, far from the shadow of the ship, looking for a place to surface safely. He trained a wary eye on the depths, where snaking tentacles sought fresh prey. He closed his ears to the screams of the men around him—how they still lived, he couldn't fathom—but instead drew away to a place where it seemed no one wished to go.

It was strange that they avoided it. Here light shone; here, the monsters did not come— ah, but they were fleeing to where the door had been. Danis had forgotten that—doors did not exist in the great depths that he loved, so it had slipped his mind. From his calmer vantage point, he watched them—the kraken in the deep, the great fish that swarmed around the men, the leviathan that hunted, the ship that rolled amidst the thunder and the waves—all swarming round and round but never touching, in ever widening circles.

He turned his back on them; he did not think he would find any answers there. Instead, he craned his neck to see if there was anything hidden in the sky, any secrets that would reveal itself to his gaze. But all he felt was the warmth of the setting sun—how could there be warmth in this cold, cold place? What was he to do? How could he begin to defeat the monsters that were not real?

For that was the truth of the matter, Danis discerned. All of it—this great sea, these terrifying monsters, the screaming, drowning, dying men—was an illusion; but where was the illusion master? And if they were merely illusions could they still harm him? He decided that they could. After all, he could feel the cold of the sea. He struck out towards the ship—there were strange men in turbans on it and he wanted to ask them if they could help him.

He stopped and tread water as large, sleek bodies blocked his way. A dolphin pod circled him, and with whistles and clicks they started to herd him away.

“What do you want, friends? Is it not cold for you here?” he asked as he followed, mimicking as they dived and frolicked. They came to a stop in still waters far from the battle, facing the setting sun, each dipping their heads at the bright ball of light. Danis could feel the intense heat of the sun that warmed the water and burnt his skin. On his left rose a tall rock cliff. He wondered why he had not noticed it earlier. Then in perfect synchronisation, the dolphins dove.

Curious, Danis followed. The twelve dolphins had formed a semi-circle in front of an underwater opening in the rock. They flicked their tails as if gesturing for him to enter, so he surfaced, refilled his lungs, and swam into the opening. It grew darker and darker the further in he swam. Just when he wanted to turn around and head out again, the roof began to slope upwards at a sharp angle. With only a slight hesitation, Danis pushed on.

He broke the surface with a gasp. The narrowing tunnel had suddenly widened into a huge cavern. The sheer walls of rock that rose up beside and behind him narrowed far above, but did not close, allowing the rays of the sun to peek in. Directly in front of him was a beach, the white sand pristine and undisturbed. Below him were splendid living corals of many colours. Tiny coral reef fish darted in and out among them like a familiar friend. Between the corals and the sand, he caught glimpses of gold. He frowned. Were these not the fish he had swum with in the warm south? How did they survive in these frigid waters? More illusions, he decided. He struck out towards the shore.

The only thing Danis could think about as he waded to shore was to build a huge fire to warm himself. All thoughts of the monsters he had to kill and the quest he was on had faded into the background of his mind as he shivered. He had to stay alive if he wanted to kill the monster.

He stomped up and down the beach searching for its meagre supply of driftwood. By the time he gathered a pile enough to burn, the sun was dangerously low. Despondently, he looked around, rubbing his neck and wondering how he was going to light a fire without matches. His fingers paused on the unfamiliar chain around his neck and his face lit up. He took off the gold chain, turning over the crystal pendant in his hand and eyeing the final rays of the sun as it streamed into the cavern.

Holding up the clear stone to catch the light, he concentrated the light on his pile of firewood. He sighed in relief as a tiny tendril of smoke rose, though it was a long while before actual flames started to flicker. Then a strange thing happened. In the flickering light, it seemed that the walls surrounding him shimmered and started to melt. The lapping waves he had swum in started to roil as if coming to a boil.

A beautiful young lady with long, black hair materialised before him. Her face was whiter than Hana's, almost transparent. "Why? Why do you do this?"

"I-I was cold."

"No fire. Not here!" But she didn't move to put it out, keeping her distance instead. The cave walls melted like dripping wax, revealing a deep star-studded twilight, which in turn yielded to thick drifts of packed snow. Eventually, all the colours ran into one, flowing like an endless stream into the fire, until Danis and the woman stood on snowy ground lit only by the light of the flickering fire.

"Who are you?" Danis asked.

"Some call me Yuki-Onna." Although Danis heard her words, the woman's blue lips hadn't moved.

"Why are you doing this?"

"I was a poor woman once, lost in the snow. I was freezing and no one would let me in to their house. No begging, they said. I perished a few metres from the king's house and as I did, I cursed them to an everlasting winter; that the Wind would take their children and the Frost would take their limbs. And now it is your turn to die."

She lunged at him, but the fire stood between them and she could not reach him.

"You cannot escape me, winter child. The fire will soon die and then the Frost and the Wind will take you."

Danis smiled. "But I am no child of the winter, Yuki-Onna. I am Danis, son of the Sun and the Sea and I am not afraid of fire as you are." With that, he grabbed a fistful of the burning coal and ash, flinging it at the snow-woman. She shrieked as her white kimono burst into flames.

The fire engulfed her, and he wondered if he had done the right thing, but as quickly as the fire had started, it died out.

## IV

Danis stood staring at the pile of ashes by his feet for a long while before he raised his eyes and inspected his surroundings. He now stood in a large, airy room. The thick drapes had been pulled aside and the windows hung open, allowing a cool breeze to circulate in the room. He discarded the thick coats he was wearing, even as he wondered how it was that he still wore them when he thought he had lost them in the sea.

Hana ran into the room, eyes sparkling. “You did it! You’ve broken our enchantment! Come see!”

She pulled him to the window. Instead of the deep winter he had expected, the city had erupted into a frenzy of flowers. Crowds of people had emerged from their houses and were congregating in the courtyard of the castle. Children skipped and danced on snowless ground for the first time in their lives. Then the crowd noticed Danis and Hana and a reverent hush fell. Those in front bent low at the waist and soon it rippled through the crowd.

Hana bowed back, gesturing for Danis to do the same. Then she took his hand and pulled him away from the window.

“Come, my father awaits.”

Hand in hand, dark against fair, they traversed corridors that finally showed signs of life. The King of Winter lay in state in a cold, dark room, his hands folded across his chest.

*You have done it then, son of the Sun.*

“I have.”

*Good. Go then—take Hana to your home in the south. You have my blessing.*

Danis turned to Hana and took her hands in his. “Will you—will you have me?” he asked bashfully. “I have nothing to offer you but a poor fisherman’s life. You’ll grow freckles on that fair skin of yours, and your face will peel with the kiss of the sun. You’ll wrinkle like a raisin in the salt water and grow ugly and old like me.”

She studied him seriously. “Ugly? I find you beautiful.”

*Go then, children, and let me rest in peace.*

~

The journey home took Danis longer than his journey north. It seemed that every little town that once spurned him welcomed his wife with open arms. She clung to him, blushing as they showered her with compliments and invited her to parties and fêtes in her honour. In the beginning, they graciously attended the events, but as time drew on Danis grew restless for his home and Hana wearied of the glitz and glamour. Then they hurried south, stopping only to replenish their provisions and to rest for the night.

They stopped at the stream where Danis had met the dragon, but the forest was quiet and the great being did not show himself. Danis shrugged as they continued on. Soon, they approached the town by his home.

Mother Yara stirred at the sight of strangers passing by her house. “Where do you hail from?” she raised her voice in greeting.

“Hello, Mother,” Danis greeted in reply. “I have returned from the north with my wife.”

Only then did Mother Yara recognise the comely young man who stood before her, for his burnt skin had softened into a deep earthy brown and the wrinkles on his face had smoothed with joy, though his laugh lines had grown more prominent. Hana had given him creams for his body, making his skin supple once again, and she tended his wild hair so that it lay in soft curls instead of coarse, dry clumps.

Hana too had changed on the journey. Her pale white skin had darkened slightly to a creamy light beige and a perpetual blush covered her cheeks like pink blossoms. Her soft,

plump body had grown harder and stronger, whilst the shedding of her winter clothes had revealed the comely lines of a woman.

Even still, Mother Yara exclaimed, "She is but a child!"

Danis and Hana looked at each other and burst into peals of laughter.

"It appears that I am still too old and you are still too young," Danis rued.

"What does it matter," Hana replied as they set off towards his parents' house, "as long as we are happy together?"

Danis' mother cried tears of joy as they walked up the long driveway, for she had long feared that she had lost her only son. She hugged them to her bosom and made them promise to never leave her.

"But where is father?" Danis asked, looking around the house.

"Oh, he is out on that boat of his as usual," his mother grumbled. "He feels that it draws him closer to you."

Danis took Hana's hand and they ran out the back door onto the beach and up the pier.

"Father! I'm home!" he cried to the little fishing boat that bobbed in the waves.

His father shouted back over the distance and waved. Danis kicked off his shoes and dived into the waters, swimming in strong strokes to the boat.

"I have missed you," his father said as he helped the young man clamber on board and held him in a long embrace.

"And so have I," Danis replied. He turned back to see Hana waiting for him on the pier. "Come, let us head back so that I can introduce you to my wife."

"Why does she not come to us?"

Danis shrugged as he said, "I have yet to teach her how to swim."

~

A year passed and a son was born to Danis and Hana, as the Dragon had prophesied. Hana wrote to the steward of her city, informing them of his birth.

"Teach him well," Hana read the steward's reply, "for he will rule in your father's stead once he is of age."

Danis smiled as he cradled his young one. "We will."

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## ***About the Author***

Anna Tan grew up in Malaysia, the country that is not Singapore. In 2015, she traded in a life of annoying other bean counters for one of annoying the online world with questions about life and death and everything in between. The answer is sometimes 42. Sometimes the answers try to eat you.

When she is not writing or nitpicking over other writers' copy, she can be found reading a book or attempting to organise her room.

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## ***Other books***

*Anthologies edited by Anna:*

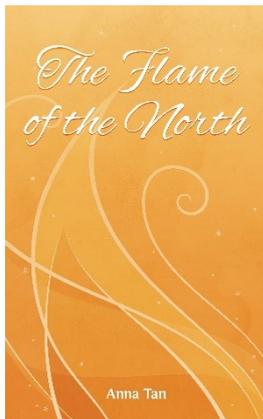
[Love in Penang](#) (Fixi Novo; 2013)

*Short stories:*

“Codes,” published in [Cyberpunk: Malaysia](#) (Fixi Novo; 2015)

“When Winds Blow Cold,” e-book single (2015)

“The Flame of the North,” e-book single (2017)

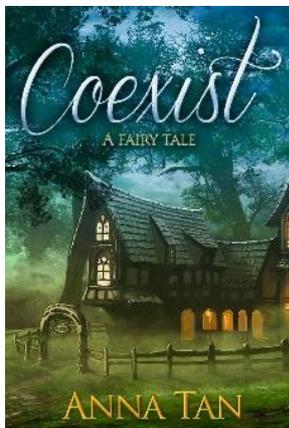


Ten-year-old Mica hates the cold. Yet he’s bound by duty—and prophecy—to rule over the City of Winter as his grandfather’s heir. All signs seem to indicate that something is wrong and the reappearance of the Yuki-Onna in the Painted Hall is an additional worrisome detail...

The Flame of the North (North #2) follows Danis & Hana’s son as he attempts to fulfil the last portion of Dragon’s Prophecy.

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*Novellas:*



Jane Hays has been told all her life that it's dangerous to be out in the forest past sundown. At fifteen, she's quite sure that it's all old wives' tales... yet, why does her village bar the gates every night? Why do they even *have* gates? When she is caught in an unexpected rainstorm on her way home, Jane ignores all the warnings and seeks shelter in a cottage in the middle of the forest. Soon, she is caught up in a world of magic and beauty—and in the storm of the Fairy Queen's wrath.

The Fairy Queen is out for blood. There have been intruders—*human* intruders—in her domain and she will stop at nothing to find them and kill them. After all, it is only fair. She is only seeking retribution for the death that humans leave in their wake.

But Jane isn't all that she seems to be. And the events of the night aren't as innocent as they appear.

A tale of magic, fairy creatures and family, *Coexist* is a novella for the young and the young-at-heart.

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