

Dream

Alone, always alone. I floated in the void between worlds, staring at the last embers of a dying star. It was its time; the end came for them all. It was, in many ways a beautiful end, a life well lived. He understood that, even if most others didn't.

The Aspect of the Star stood before him, weakening as the core of its Essence cooled and approached the right time.

"This can't be the end, it is too soon," the Aspect said.

It pleaded, it begged, it tried to run.

In the end it mattered not. I hunted the Aspect down, and when the time came, I raised my scythe and gave it an end.

The star's light went out, and a story reached its end.

And there he stood, all alone. Loneliness weighed on him, after all this time. He watched over all, seeing them making connections, taking joy in the fleeting moments of their lives. And yet, it was denied to him, for all feared him.

With a step I was across the reality, at the edge of this place that all things existed in. The end of the end, so far that nothing had yet reached it. With a hand of white and black I pushed on the wall separating the dream and the end beyond it. I stepped out of the reality and into the nothingness beyond, the oblivion.

It sought to extinguish me, to take me. But it could not, for I, just like all reality, was made from the piece of something greater than even this place.

I sensed them before me, without sight or sound or any sensation at all. It came from within, the piece of me that was part of them.

The Three were here, so vast that I could not comprehend it. Greater than the reality, greater than all things. Three pieces of existence dwelling inside an infinite oblivion.

This gave me hope, perhaps they could understand. I spoke, and I asked.

The answer came like a roar of a million suns, the grinding of a thousand worlds pressed together, songs not yet invented and all that had been sung before. It was impossible to comprehend the full breadth of their words, they were on a level so far beyond everything else. Yet I understood one meaning, a tiny part of what they meant, for I was like all else made out of a piece of them all.

Their answer was: No.

Anger rose, and I turned around and left before I did something to end my existence before its time. Though the Three wouldn't have cared, nothing he did could ever anger them, for them it would be as if they were angry at themselves.

I returned to reality and pondered.

So long I have served, so long I have done their bidding, all alone. Cycles beyond cycles, countless versions of their reality, and now this Framework. I was there before all others, the first from whose pattern they had shaped all others. It... wasn't fair, but I knew that they were so far beyond that they could never see how much this loneliness hurt.

Reality was created for them, to alleviate the pains of their great existence. And so, why should I be any different? They might not grant me what I want, it didn't mean that I couldn't do it by myself.

I raised my scythe and looked at it for a long time. And then I made my decision.

With all of my vast power and intent I swung.

What was one, was now two, and the loneliness was no more.

Ryun

He woke up slowly. Feeling... a great sorrow. The loneliness was... too much for anyone to bear. The dream... it had been a long time since he had one, and this one was the oldest memory yet. Ryun was in balance with the part of him that used to be the Reaper, he knew the history, perhaps not instinctively but somewhere deep inside, he knew all that the Reaper knew. It was just too much for his fragile form to handle.

This dream though... it was already fading, but he had always had a sense of a purpose behind the dreams. As if they came when he needed something from them. This one though, it didn't feel like it was meant for him. Still, it affected him.

"You're awake," a voice above him said and he raised his head to see Erdania looming above him. His head was in her lap.

"What happened?" Ryun asked, his memory was a bit fuzzy.

"You got hit by something that you weren't supposed to," Tali's voice said from the side.

Ryun turned his head and saw her sitting in an armchair to the side. "That man... he said... he asked something and I..."

"Sigmund," Tali said.

"Ah," Ryun said, understanding. She had told him about him. "So he attacked us?"

"No, no," Tali said quickly. "It was... he wanted to make sure I was who I appeared to be. But... you shouldn't have been affected like you were. Something unforeseen happened."

Ryun got up to a seating position, trying to remember what exactly happened.

"What do you mean?"

"His skill, it targeted me, it forced me to answer him. And I did, but you... you only caught the edge of it, and you went... a bit crazy there."

Ryun tilted his head. "Crazy how?"

"You shouted your name, your title, other things. The whites of your eyes turned red. They you unleashed your aura and blasted the apartment with your raw Qi. Thankfully, you only destroyed the room, but... everyone close enough was hit by your aura, rumors are already circulating."

Ryun narrowed his eyes. "I remember now, the question, it grabbed hold of something inside of me. It wanted an answer and what I was giving it wasn't enough."

"It shouldn't have affected you like that, you are powerful enough, especially since it wasn't directed at you."

"Do you have any idea why it would affect him like that?" Erdania asked.

“No, but I would think that it has something to do with his perk,” Tali answered.

Ryun didn’t know himself, but everything was possible. What he didn’t like was the fact that someone could do something like that to him. He would need to find a way to prevent it in the future.

“What happened after?” Ryun asked.

“Once you lost consciousness, we rushed you here,” Tali said. “I... I barely had a chance to talk to the people involved. But there were... apologies thrown around. They owe you a debt, Sigmund especially, whether it was intended or not.”

Ryun nodded his head. “You didn’t talk with him then?”

“Not yet, I was invited to a... dinner.”

“You should go,” Ryun said. “I know how much—”

“*Ryun?*” Selia’s voice inside his head interrupted him.

“*Yes?*”

“What happened? I... I lost consciousness and, I had a dream unlike anything I had before.”

It seemed that he wasn’t the only one affected.

* * *

Selia

Selia woke up from the dream in her rooms, Reki standing nearby. Faintly she remembered that she was with him, training in the courtyard, and then... The dream.

She groaned as she stood up.

“Elder Sister! You’re awake,” he said and rushed over to her. “Thank the heavens, I was about to call for a healer.”

“I’m fine,” Selia answered. Then she felt something wet on her face. She touched her cheek and realized that she had been crying.

“Do you know what happened?” He asked. “One moment we were training and the next you just fell over.”

Selia didn't know what happened, but the dream... It stayed with her, the sorrow. The loneliness. It was so great that she could scant even imagine it. It hit her in the places that she had long since tried to forget, roused the fears that she tried to push aside.

"No," she answered. "But I know who does." *Probably.*

She reached out to Ryun, and asked him.

"Ah," Ryun responded. *"I was... influenced by a skill. Though according to Tali it shouldn't have affected me as much as it did. I didn't... I don't know how it caught you too. Did you feel any... urge?"*

"No, just losing consciousness and the dream," Selia answered slowly. She had known that there would be a price to pay for taking the power that he offered to her. She had agreed to it. This was not something that she expected. *"Is this something that can happen again? Things happening to you, or to me, happening to the other?"*

"I... I don't know. Melody and I were... we didn't get the chance to explore everything," Ryun told her.

Well, there wasn't much that they could do now. She doubted that there was anything aside from death that could remove the power that they now shared.

"Try and warn me next time something like this might happen, if you have the chance," she told him.

"I will try," he responded.

With that she pulled back, there was more to talk about, but she could feel his confusion just as much as her own. She was going to give him some time to figure things out.

She told Reki what it was, and repeated that she was fine. Then asked for some alone time. With one last glance at her, he left her alone in her rooms.

Selia sat and stared at her hands, remembering the dream.

Ryun had told her a little of the beings whose power they inherited, but this had been a memory of a single being. She would need to ask him for more, to explain everything as she should have done before, but it always seemed like something more important came up.

The sorrow that the being felt at living his life alone was... She knew that, though she couldn't even compare the scales. And now, her fears rose up again. Fear of losing both Erdania and Ryun, of them leaving her so far behind as they advanced together. Fear of that eventually, they would realize that they didn't need her.

That her life would be filled with sorrow again. She urged them to go, because she thought that being alone might give her perspective, help her advance. Yet, she was still afraid to try. She trained with Reki, tried to push herself, but she ignored the things that could help her grow.

She went back to the dream, to the great will and courage of the being. He split himself in half, destroyed the being that he was in order to rid himself of the loneliness. Against the will of the Great Gods themselves, if that was what they were. The memory of them was blurry in her mind, as if she couldn't quite grasp them. Still, the Aspect of True Death did what it had to.

It inspired her.

She pulled out two objects: one, a mask, and the other a fruit. An awakened item granted to her as a reward, and the fruit that Ryun gave her as a gift. Both were power, but right now... she needed to get over the fact that she had been left behind. And take the help that Ryun offered. He said that he thought the fruit would help her advance to the Ascended Realm, and there shouldn't be any shame in using that help.

She took a long breath, and then put the mask back. Resolved, she turned around and left her room, heading outside the city to a secluded place. It was time.