

Worth

She couldn't sleep, the nerves and anxiousness made it impossible. They had sent a message back to the Midnight Reign Sect, informing them that Anrosh would be arriving in a few weeks to talk. They hadn't responded, and she would leave for their sect tomorrow. She had felt so confident when she talked with Tali, but now... She shook her head and pulled the cover over her tightly. Nayra grumbled in her sleep and Anrosh smiled.

Then, she froze. Her echo sense alerted her. They weren't alone. She debated waking Nayra immediately, but she couldn't quite tell where the threat was. Then her sense caught it again. She turned sharply, Kagehime appearing in her hand as she swung, her mouth opening to yell and wake up Nayra.

Her sword stopped, a hand catching the blade and her yell died in her throat.

Ryun stood above her, one hand holding the blade and the other gesturing with a finger over his mouth. He released Kagehime while she blinked in shock. He turned and walked over to the balcony, his steps silent.

She glanced at Nayra, then dismissed her sword. Carefully, as to not wake Nayra up, she got out of bed, put some clothes on and walked out.

She stepped up to the railing and looked at Ryun. Before she could speak, he shook his head and stepped up on the railing shaped a Void platform and gestured for her to get up. Then, he started running through the air, creating more steps and heading out of Consequence. She paused for only a moment and felt the step beneath her tremble. She jumped to the next as it fell apart, and then started following after him. He was going slow enough that she could follow, the spacing between the steps just enough that she could reach them. Still, she barely managed it. She didn't like the height, she didn't know how he did this all the time. She ran after him for a few minutes, and just as she started to feel tired they reached a hill outside of the city, away from any prying eyes. He landed and waited for her to do the same.

He stood there, just looking at her. For a few moments she did the same. And then she jumped forward and embraced him, held him close. For a

moment, he didn't react, but then he relaxed. His arms enveloped her and he leaned her head against her. She had forgotten just how small he was. She towered over him, but in her memories he always towered over everyone else. It had been years since she saw him, spoke to him. He was... such a big part of her life, family. She knew that he had survived—well, died, but still survived. She had worried, wondered, envied Selia her connection with him even though she would never really want something like that.

“I missed you,” she whispered.

“And I missed you too,” Ryun said back.

They stood there for a while, and then finally she took a step back and looked down at him. “You are back,” she said. “I... Selia told me that you were back a while ago, I... I didn't expect you back here so soon. It took them years.”

Ryun shrugged. “I can move faster than they can. And I still took my time.”

“I'm so glad that you are back,” Anrosh said, feeling like a weight was lifted from her chest. “We... there is a lot to talk about, a lot that I have to tell you. But... first, we have a problem with another sect, but now that you are here we can—”

“The Midnight Reign Sect, I know,” he interrupted.

Anrosh blinked. “You know?” Immediately, a suspicion appeared in her mind. *He wouldn't have...*

“*Oh, he definitely would,*” Kagehime chimed in.

“I've been back for a few days,” Ryun looked away. “I was... listening.”

“You didn't come to me,” Anrosh said, and even though she tried, she couldn't quite mask the hurt in her voice.

He looked back at her, his eyes boring into hers. “I wanted to see the state of the sect, of how things were going.”

“And?”

He sagged, an expression that should've been accompanied by a sigh, yet it didn't. That's when she noticed it, he wasn't breathing. As he formed his response she took the time to look at him, really look at him. He had changed, advanced certainly. An Evolved Realm Cultivator for sure, she could tell. He was what many considered a an unlikely dream, and she knew that he didn't plan on stopping there. How different he was from everybody

else... But then again, only those like him were the ones that reach as far as he had, as he will.

“I’ve made many mistakes,” Ryun said finally. “I’ve treated this sect as something that it isn’t, not understanding why sects are the way they are. Tali was right, in that conversation you had with her. I think that I understand it more now. Things will need to change, I will need to change.”

“We will have the time, I have some ideas that I planned on speaking with you about. But now we need to deal with the Midnight Reign Sect, though now that you are here you can just go and see what they want.”

Ryun shook his head, a sad expression on his face. “No Anrosh, I can’t. You are the one that will go.”

She was... taken aback by that. “What do you mean? You can clear everything up, they asked for you. We have a debt. Our people were in the wrong and we had ignored them.”

Ryun looked away. “I understand far more now... It is not my place. I was wiser than I knew when I put you in charge. I was not meant for dealing with things like that. I cannot deal with them even if the theft is an excuse to talk with me.” He shook his head. “I should’ve seen this. We grew, our sect became larger, my name became known. As Tali said, my Face, it holds this sect together. And it attracts those who are more powerful. And I left it all on your shoulders, I am sorry for that, but... I need you to be this for me, for us.”

“Why?” She asked slowly. She knew him well enough to know that this wasn’t just a random thought.

“Because I am not good with words, because I am who I am. Because I made a vow, I gave my word to protect those who are mine,” he said harshly, his hand reached to his chest grasping at nothing an intense expression on his face. “I can feel it in here, the need to go and see to it myself. To protect them. The only reason I am not there now is because I heard Lesamitrius say that they are unharmed, because I know that you will go. You are my right hand Anrosh, the extension of my will. I know that you will deal with it. And you will deal it better than I could. I do not lie, when I speak promises other see threats. Even to an old Ascended Cultivator I would tell him to return what is mine or die, I do not live in the world of compromises and agreements. I would look for a reason to bring him to an *end*. To witness all that that sect

is and punish for slights that could be dealt with in other ways. That is why I have you, why I put you in charge of the sect, I didn't even know back then why I did it, but I understand now. Even when I didn't understand, I felt it, I needed someone to stand between me and others. Because I cannot solve these problems any other way. I've shaped myself as a monster that doesn't allow anyone in his way, a monster that keeps his word," he shook his head and chuckled.

He paused, then looked as if he struggled to say something else. "I threatened an Empire," he whispered finally. "And I truly felt like I could hurt them. I knew that I could do it. I went into the fight with the Dome Leader knowing that I could help kill it. And I... I failed, all of us but two failed. We triumphed and I... I lost."

It was a rare thing for him to show such emotion. "How did you lose?"

"The Dome Leader had incredible power over the mind. He captured all of us. I was helpless, I can't even remember what happened while he was inside my head. I just know that I could do nothing to escape. If Zach didn't free himself, if he didn't free Eratemus... We would've all perished there. That... that was the first time in my life Anrosh, I don't remember it, but I have that feeling stuck inside of my chest... the certainty that I would've lost on my own."

Anrosh walked over, and put a hand on his shoulder, squeezed reassuringly.

"This is about the sects, this is about Face and respect and honor, about obligation. You need to be the face of our sect, and I can make you that."

She tilted her head at him.

"I have... gifts for you. But first, I will raise you to Evolved, before you go," he told her as if he was saying something so ordinary.

She blinked, opened her mouth, hesitated. When she had asked him to share his inspiration with her, she had known that she would always depend on him to grow. She knew that, she had expected it. It was just... she opened her mouth to voice her doubts.

"Don't," he interrupted her. "I know what you want to say."

His eyes bored into hers, then he continued.

“I have listened to the people talking in the city. I know what some say behind closed doors,” she glanced away, feeling... not ashamed, but... unworthy in a way. It did weigh on her mind. Especially after her... blunders.

He reached out, grabbed her face and turned it around, he cupped her cheeks with both hands forcing her to look at him. “Listen to me,” he started. “They don’t know anything. Those who dare to call you a leech, who dare to say that you are undeserving of what you gained, they are ignorant little idiots. Weak and jealous of what you have, angry that they can’t have the same. Nothing in this life is granted for free, power doesn’t come to those who sit in small rooms and complain, whisper in the dark where they think no one can hear. Fuck them and their moronic opinions,” there was such heat to his words, she had rarely heard him speak with such passion. It warmed her heart that he would speak that way for her. “You never received anything that you didn’t deserve, anything that you didn’t earn. You have given me more than anyone else in my entire life had Anrosh. You were by my side from the moment I arrived in this world. You are my right hand, you are my family. The sister that I never had, closer to me than my family on Earth, whose faces I can’t even remember, ever was. You deserve everything, never let them get into your head. You might not have paid for your power with blood, but you paid all the same. You sacrificed your life to be my caretaker, my family, to protect the world from me. And am I sorry for putting you here, but this is where I need you. I need you to stand in between me and the world, to keep me from going too far. I wouldn’t have survived this world without you, or if I would, I would not be who I am today.”

He pulled her head down, forced her to bend low enough, and then he rose and kissed her on both cheeks. Affection from him was... she would remember this always. Tears filled her eyes.

“I was alone for so long,” Ryun said. “And in the Void, while I recovered, I realized just how much I need people, how much I miss them, you. I will never let you go Anrosh. I love you sister, and you will come with me to the end, always by my side. To Eternal Realm and beyond, through time, until the end of all things. I will not let you die. And so, I cannot let you go and meet with this sect without giving you everything that I can. Your name will

be known, spoken in the same breath as mine. I promise you this, we will make it happen.”

She tried to find something to say. Thanking him seemed such a small thing, barely enough. Words failed her, so she just pulled him close. Held him as he held her. Knowing that she had what she had always wanted, a family.