

The Sect

Nayra walked through the gardens with Anrosh, their fingers entwined. The cold coming from Anrosh's hand was... uncomfortable, forcing Nayra to channel **Scorching Mist Qi** through her conduits to prevent her hand from going numb. Something had drastically changed about Anrosh, and Nayra hadn't yet asked what exactly happened. The physical change alone was incredible, the white lines crisscrossing her skin were reminiscent of the cracks that she saw in Ryun's skin, only Anrosh's didn't mist how his did and were a lot more delicate and fine. The cold of her body was another new thing also. Anrosh had come back from the Midnight Reign Sect and sent her off without explaining. It made her think that something had happened at that sect, that somehow Anrosh had improved her True Body. The more worrying thing was that she couldn't feel any of Anrosh's power.

Still, she trusted Anrosh enough that she had agreed to her request and didn't press on the issue. She had spent the last few weeks visiting her family as part of theirs—though, mostly Anrosh's and Tali's—plan to fix the issues that had been plaguing the sect. She had gone to her parents and siblings and given them Anrosh's message. It was... a lot to ask for, she knew, and her parents hadn't given Nayra a response.

She had gained a lot of respect with her family and the people that came with them. Her fights against the Generals, the defense of the city, the people looked up at her. And still they wouldn't tell her anything. A part of her was hurt, they considered her part of the Twilight Melody Sect more than an Ornn. That hadn't been the case before, but since they had arrived, her family had been able to see her place in the sect. See that she really was a Sect Leader.

Still, she had passed on the message and the invitation. She would find out their answer soon enough. Now, she turned her attention to Anrosh. Their deal was for her to tell her about what happened once she returned, and she had been patient.

“So, are you going to tell me what happened?” Nayra said after a while. She did enjoy the silence, spending time in each other's company, but she was also curious.

“Ryun,” Anrosh responded.

Nayra blinked. “That doesn’t answer me anything.”

Anrosh chuckled, then looked around the garden. A few warriors stood guard above them on the walls, children played in a corner. Then she pointed them out of the garden. “We should go somewhere more private.”

She wanted to ask why, but she held her tongue. Anrosh led them through the Consequence palace and then down the stairs into the meditation and training rooms. They had several newly built, some even with weak sources. Most were fire based, as they had been installed by the previous owner of the city, but Anrosh had added a few more—at a significant cost to the sect, but they were worth it. She led them to one of the large empty rooms which most used for private team training. The fact that they were underground added privacy, as some people wanted to keep their abilities hidden, and there were also formations in the walls that prevented spying as well. Though they weren’t high tiered, people that really wanted to look in would be able to, it was sufficient.

Once they were inside Anrosh turned around and spoke. “I have to show you something.”

Nayra frowned as Anrosh glanced up at the ceiling.

“This should be high enough,” Anrosh said.

“High enough for what?” Nayra asked, not following at all what Anrosh was trying to say.

Anrosh’s eyes sparkled with mischief, and then she removed her robes, storing them in her storage. A moment later she started to change, Qi flooded out of her, and still Nayra couldn’t sense it. Anrosh grew Qi transforming into a large shape that quickly solidified.

Nayra’s eyes widened as she took in Anrosh’s new form.

She was covered in red fur, streaked with white in the same patterns as those that were covering her skin before. She was tall, almost touching the high ceiling that was at least two stories above them. Her feet, her paws actually, were freezing the ground where she stood, frost crystals spreading across the stone. The air around her was misting, her sense noticing the drop in temperature around her. Her claws were white, crystallized in the same way that Ryun’s fingers were, only Anrosh’s were made out of **Absolute**

Cold Qi. On two of her... fingers? Just behind where the claws peeked out of fur were rings that had grown with her body. Her eyes were pale blue orbs that instilled the sense of the cold in Nayra's bones. And then, three shapes flew out of her back. Three diamond shape constructs obviously made out of Qi. They looked like... shields at first glance, and all three were floating in the air not attached to anything. Each the size of Nayra's entire body.

Nayra took a step closer and Anrosh dipped her head low enough that she could touch her. "You're beautiful," Nayra said as she touched the soft fur. It was cold, and she had to channel more Qi through her entire body as she felt her heat being sapped, but it was worth it to touch her. Anrosh closed her eyes and Nayra marveled at her. She couldn't quite believe her eyes, that a giant red-white wolf stood before her.

"Evolved?" Nayra whispered. "That's what you meant."

She realized that Ryun had to have raised her again. But when? She had assumed that something had happened in the sect that she had gone to visit, but instead... And those two rings too, they were powerful, she could tell just by looking at them, did Ryun give her those too?

"Yes," she said, her voice deep and growly.

"He is back?" Nayra asked.

Anrosh nodded, then returned back to her ordinary form and told her everything.

Nayra couldn't quite believe everything that Anrosh had told her, about what Ryun did for her, about what happened in the Midnight Reign Sect.

"Where is he now?" Nayra asked after Anrosh finished her story. "Why is he not announcing his return?"

The sect needed him back, his presence would've done a lot to stabilize things. Though, she had to admit that Anrosh had been doing an admirable job of it. She had dealt with another sect, and though no one knew quite what had happened with her, there were whispers. If Nayra could no longer sense Anrosh's power, neither could anyone else close to her in tiers. People were curious.

“He is doing... Ryun things,” Anrosh sighed. “He is going around the sect, listening, getting a feel for things.”

Nayra shook her head, it was... such a Ryun thing to do. Something else occurred to her. “Is Tali with him? Is that why she’s been absent?”

Anrosh looked tired all of a sudden. “Probably, the two of them are... I don’t know if scheming is the right word. I don’t think that they care enough to keep secrets. They are just... I don’t even know.”

“Is he going to be here for the gathering?” Nayra asked. It was what Anrosh had sent her to her family for, and she knew that she had invited the Zenshuen people as well.

“I don’t know,” Anrosh said. “Last we spoke about it, he wanted me to take charge. I am... I guess that I lead the sect.”

It had always been that way, but both of them had always known their limitations. Except, now those obstacles were less. Nayra had gained power, and had the respect of her people, she could even level and evolve her Class again—though she hadn’t done so yet for many reasons, the main being that the Ethereal Realm was still barred from everyone. Not even she could access it, and a lot of her Class was meant to be used with it. No one knew what was wrong, and so no one knew if it was permanent. She couldn’t risk picking a Class that would be crippled. Still, she was stronger now, a Sect Leader that had influence in the Sect and among their... guests.

And Anrosh was in the Evolved Realm. She had entered the upper tiers of power, and that alone would sway many to her. The core of the Twilight Melody Sect, what used to be Black Viper and Last Ember Sects were loyal to her. They knew her and respected her power. They also understood her relationship to Ryun.

The newer people that joined them were different, they were here for protection that the sect provided and the name of a High Ranker that had slain the Dome Leader. They followed her because they saw her as the extension of Ryun. She was that, of course, but any decisions that she made were weighed, not immediately followed.

This gathering was meant to change all of that.

“Do you want him there?” Nayra asked.

“I...” Anrosh started. “He and I have talked a lot about it. I will always lead the sect, and this is my burden to bear. My problem to solve.”

Nayra nodded her head. She would do as much as she could to help, but it was, as she had said, her burden to bear. All she could do was support her as best as she could.

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Anrosh stood in the middle of the forest, away from the city. The moon was above her, its pale light bathing the world in shadows. She didn't have to wait long for Ryun to arrive. Nayra had returned a few days ago, and so she had been expecting him. This time he hadn't woken her up in the middle of the night at least, instead he had just sent a simple message on a slip of paper to her office, saying to meet up at the same place as last time. She recognized Tali's handwriting, so she assumed that she was back too, or she wrote it for him in advance. She wasn't sure if he even could write, his difficulty with reading certain types of documents was already something that she knew she couldn't deal with. She relied on her sight too much.

“So, was it a... productive trip?” Anrosh asked.

“It was,” Ryun said.

She wasn't talking about the Midnight Reign Sect, he had already come back and talked to her about that one before. Though he had said frustratingly little. She had hoped to learn what the Sect Head Repesh wanted with him, but Ryun was tight lipped about it.

No, what she was referring too was his most recent trip around the sect territories, more precisely their northern territories, where their Empire guests resided.

“And what did you learn?” Anrosh asked.

“A lot of interesting things,” Ryun said.

Anrosh glared at him as she started to get frustrated. “I do need to know Ryun. If everything is going to go according to plan I need as much information as possible.”

“Well,” Ryun said as he slowly walked up to stand next to her. “Not all of Nayra’s siblings like her that much, some most certainly don’t approve of the two of you being together.”

Anrosh blinked, that was not what she had asked about, but... It did interest her. “What do you mean?”

“You know, the classic she is a filthy Cultivator nonsense,” Ryun added.

Anrosh relaxed, it wasn’t nearly as bad as where her mind went initially.

“But don’t worry,” Ryun put a hand on her shoulder. “Her parents seem to approve, so that is a big win.”

Anrosh shuddered, just thinking about standing in the same room as Nayra’s parents made her hairs stand up. They were... nice to her, but she could tell that something dark lurked behind their eyes. They were... powerful.

She coughed and shifted her feet. “That’s not what I asked about.”

“But it is what you wanted to know about,” Ryun smiled.

Anrosh grimaced and didn’t deny it.

“Fine,” Ryun said after a moment. “They are... split on it. I think that many are expecting to talk with me before making a decision. You will need to sway them yourself.”

Anrosh sighed. She hadn’t really expected anything else.

“Are you ready for it?” Ryun asked.

“I think so,” Anrosh answered.

“You will do great,” Ryun said. “Well, we do have a couple of weeks before they arrive. We should take the time and train your Evolved Form. It takes some time getting used to moving with four legs.”

Anrosh suppressed the desire to refuse. She had too much paperwork to deal with, but she knew that she needed training too. Finally, she nodded her head, agreeing. She had to do everything in her power to get ready for the gathering.