

# AGE ENLIGHTENMENT

## COMMISSION STORY

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Trips through the deserts of Sumeru certainly weren't something that Dehya was a stranger to.

You could say that she had been born among the sand, *molded* by it! But a tale such as that was fairly common of any Eremite worth their salt in the grand scheme of things. Her people had braved the heat and harsh sands for as long as they had existed, and through the many generations that spanned across the nation's history, they had practically become one with the desert itself.

Even that day was one that took advantage of this knowledge, for as a member of the Blazing Beasts faction she was often tasked with completing a variety of commissions for good pay, many of them carrying very dangerous risks. But it was *fine*. She was known notoriously as 'Flame-Mane Dehya'. Her name alone struck fear in the hearts of any that knew it, meaning that barring exceptions any foes that knew better steered clear of her in the grand scheme of things.

**“And another dangerous job without any danger, huh? Well... Maybe things will be a little more exciting on the trip *back*?”** She had been asked to escort a scholar from the Akademiya out into the desert from Sumeru City. Apparently some sort of villain had taken a bounty out on them and so great danger had been promised for the trip. But in the end? There hadn't even been a monster attack. Maybe any potential attackers had steered clear because of Dehya's presence? She would likely never know for sure.

It was advised not to navigate the desert late at night. Monsters were one thing, but there were Treasure Hoarders and other Eremite factions

to consider. Getting attacked, kidnapped, or *worse* in the black of night wasn't all that uncommon, so unless it was a necessity most people opted to set up camps in secluded areas with guards if they didn't avoid it outright.



Dehya, on the other hand, was used to these late night strolls. Her escort commission had taken the entire day and by the time she had delivered them to their destination? The moon was high in the sky and she had to return to the nearest village for a new job in the morning. There was nothing in the sands that frightened her, though.

Were there things that piqued her curiosity? *Certainly.* **“Hm? What’s this? Some sort of mechanical device...?”**

With a sea of sand surrounding her, it was the sight of moonlight reflecting off a smooth surface that had caught her eye during her walk. It wasn't all that large, and in fact it was small enough that she could pick it up with a single hand – something that she did in fact do. **“Seems a little like the doohickies the Traveler was picking up in the ruins, but...”**

This really wasn't her area of expertise. The object was a cube in shape, but had bright blue spikes sticking out of its corners. It fit in the palm of her hand but it would *definitely* hurt a ton if she closed her fingers around it. But because she didn't know what it was or what it did, she wasn't certain if it was *safe*. It could have been some sort of bomb for all she knew, couldn't it?

**“Hmm... Should I just put it back where I found it? But even if the Traveler doesn't want it, surely a scholar would be interested?”** Considering how the desert worked, if she put it back where she found it then it might never have been found again. If you dropped something in the sands then the sands would eventually consume them. This was just as true of *bodies* as it was of trinkets; a cold truth about the nature of the desert itself.

Among the many scholars of the Akademiya she could think of a few that might be interested. Hell, even the Archon of Wisdom herself might have been a little curious – but there *was* one woman in particular that she was thinking of. A woman whose small stature and youthful glow betrayed the truth of her age. Not that she could be *blamed* seeing as she had been trapped in some ruins for a century, her body preserved through a mysterious stasis.

**“I wish Madame Faruzan were here. She seems like the kind of woman that would have an idea about whether or not this thing is dangerous.”** An idle musing about a solution that certainly would have aided her in this predicament was only that: an idle musing. Yet to the device in the palm of her hand it seemed to be something a touch more *significant*. The blue spikes began to glow, prompting a reaction from the Eremite that was holding it. **“Uh...”** There was a sound like energy charging? Dehya had the good sense to drop the item and take a step back.

But it was already much too late for that.

Energy jumped from all eight points of the cube and converged above it, before that beam? Well, it was fired at the only biological presence nearby. This beam of blue light struck the woman’s chest, and while it didn’t *pierce* her, she could feel a warmth radiating from the spot where contact had been made as the light faded. **“What... the hell was that?”** Had it been some manner of trap? She had to assume as much, though she had absolutely no idea what sort of purpose it might have served.

The warmth in her chest persisted but she didn’t feel *unwell*. **“Am I not in danger? But I’d expect a strange beam of light to do some sort of damage.”** That could have just been her experience as a mercenary talking though. Random laser beams typically caused injuries, particularly when they came from the technology that was found in the temples and tombs of the desert. The constructs that floated through the sands made that plenty apparent when they attacked passersby for no reason other than the fact that they were created to guard specific regions.

No, it wasn’t that *nothing* was happening. The warmth had lingered in her breast for a moment, but now Dehya could feel it *spreading*? The intensity of the sensation in her chest waned so that it remained as a mere tingling feeling, yet said feeling had stretched to her fingertips, toes, and even her face. **“That... probably isn’t good. *Statistically speaking*— Since when the heck do I know anything about statistics!?”**

It was true. Dehya certainly was no scholar, nor academically inclined whatsoever. She had been raised in the desert by the Eremites where education was limited. Rather than being taught things you might learn in a book or how to study she had been taught how to survive. And that was *fine*. So what was this knowledge swirling around in her head?

*What's the correct way to grip a blade again?*

**“H-Huh!? Of course I know how to... hold a... sword?”** It had been *such* a strange question that had flickered in the back of her mind. A stupid one for a mercenary like herself. Yet as she reached back to grab the blade that she had summoned to hover behind her, she hesitated. Why couldn't she remember the grip she was supposed to have on the handle?

Perplexed and, honestly, understandably concerned about what was going on in her head, the fact that there were physical concerns to take note have had completely escaped her attention at first. Such as? Well, the beam had first struck Dehya's chest before the energy had dispersed throughout the rest of her body, and it was there where the first of many alarming changes occurred.

It wasn't a matter of a *singular* change affecting her bosom though. Perhaps the most obvious was the *size* of her chest. The Eremite certainly wasn't a woman that typically lacked in the bosom department, or at the very least she wasn't *supposed* to be. And yet? The well of weight that they she had grown accustomed to by now dissipated. Her hefty chest became lighter in terms of mass, breasts shrinking down to B-cups while her crop top hung a little more loosely. Thankfully since it was wrapped around her shoulders there was no risk of it falling.

Those breasts had become lighter in *another* way as well, too. Sure, their weight had lightened, but so had their *color*. The skin of her breasts was a paled pink now, closer to the people who lived nearer to Sumeru City than out in the desert. Her nipples had turned pink as a result, and that paler color? Much like how the warmth had spread throughout her body, the lighter color did the same. It didn't take long at all for *all* of her skin to be lighter.

For some reason Dehya was having a harder and harder time imagining herself wielding a blade. Would her talents not have been better spent burying her nose in a tome or writing a paper? She shook her head frantically. **“N-No! Why would I do something like that!? I'm a warrior, not a scholar!”** Or so she claimed, but her build seemingly disagreed. Her skin hadn't *only* paled. It was notably softer, with all of the hard muscle she had trained over the years having practically

disintegrated. She was all skin and bones now. There was *no way* she could lift that blade regardless of how hard she tried.

And to those ends the blade floating behind her had disappeared, replaced with a tome that was meant to be used as a casting catalyst.

The Eremite wobbled to and fro, her balance jeopardized. She still hadn't noticed the changes that had affected her body thus far, and it didn't initially click that she needed to hold up her pants with one of her hands. The reason for this was pretty plain to anyone with *eyes*. The mass that kept her shorts fitted the way they were, namely her ass and thighs, had been in the process of diminishing. Not that their weight was entirely erased. Her ass was still round and perky and her thighs femininely weighted, but paired with her smaller bosom she had the appearance of a younger woman.

***“Hmph! The life of a scholar is a noble one, and so— H-Huh!?”*** Why was her voice so high? What was with that haughty manner of speech? She felt like she had heard it somewhere before fairly recently. Was it during the Akademiya Extravaganza? Around roughly the same time her wobbling finally prompted her to throw her arms out to catch her balance, and it was *then* that she finally noticed her skin. ***“Wait, what has happened to my complexion? It’s so fair! What an unusual phenomenon!”***

Dehya's words bellowed out like those of an arrogant scholar, and she quickly realized it was something that she could not stop doing. ***“And I’m growing smaller? I wish I had a parchment to record these findings!”*** Why was she so excited about this? She had felt off balance because her curves were gone, but she was also *shrinking*. Inch after inch peeled away but thanks to her shoulders and her belt, her top and shorts ultimately didn't fall off. She *did* sink into her thigh high boots though, and they rode up into her pelvis because of this.

***“Wait... The keen intellect. This small body... Could I becoming the great and amazing—!?”*** Remnants of the woman's old personality prevented her from finishing that sentence, though from the neck up the final changes were enforced upon her, wiping away any remaining physical traits from her previous life and bestowing upon her those of the woman whose name she had almost shouted in the moment.

Her long, dark brown hair with its golden under-layer found a consistent color across the board thanks to a bright and vibrant teal that replaced the previous tones. This unkempt mane straightened in style, hair growing fluffier and softer as bangs were both parted to the sides and likewise had a tuft hanging across her forehead.



This same teal graced her eyes. Eyes that rounded in shape, their overall appearance suggesting she was a more youthful woman – not that her body didn't suggest that as well. She was likely around twenty physically, her facial features as a whole becoming daintier and more compressed. A button nose rested atop thinner lips, and yet while she now lacked the raw maturity that Dehya's form usually gave off, how she looked now was *still* stunningly beautiful.

There was absolutely no way she was a warrior in this state though. Her body was too small, her arms too thin. There weren't even any callouses upon the small hands and feet that one would associate with a mercenary. Were she to pick up a weapon in this state she wouldn't be able to wield it, but then again? She couldn't remember *how* anyways. All of the knowledge in her head was much more *useful* than solely relying on violent skills.

As it turned out, the device that Dehya found had been *from* the ruins that Faruzan had been trapped in for one-hundred years, with said location actually being quite nearby. Those ruins had recently been raided by Treasure Hoarders who had taken as much as they could carry, and the trinket was just one of the things that had fallen off their cart in the process. As Faruzan had spent so long in the ruins in stasis, her biological code had been preserved and, at mention of her name, the device had sought to embody it in another.



Which explained the copy of *Faruzan* that now stood upon the sand, wearing an absolutely flummoxed expression. Her small, slender body undoubtedly belonged to a scholar, and she now possessed the knowledge and smarmy attitude to match. Yet... **“And so I’ve become Faruzan, now? What purpose does *this* serve!?”** She was even speaking like that haughty woman, yet her memories were not the Anemo wielder's at all.

She could still plainly recall being Dehya and the life she had led up until this point. Comparably, she could recall nothing personal of the life that belonged to this new existence of hers. While the body and soul could be enforced over another's, it seemed that memories were a different beast altogether. **“Wait. My transformation aside, is this**

**situation not a troublesome one? The desert so late at night is not a place for one as important as I!”**

Faruzan wasn't *technically* wrong. Her research may have seemed outdated to her peers but she was still an esteemed member of the Akademiya. Not to mention how young and beautiful her body was... and the fact that her clothes had not changed to fit her. She was lucky it had belts, so she'd be able to tighten her shorts once she pulled them up again. At the very least it appeared to element of her Vision had changed from Pyro to Anemo, meaning she could wield the new powers that were so inherent to this form.

**“Would it be enough to protect against attackers, however?”**