

## Past Recall

### Zach

Zach sat in a lavish room, Naha at his side. Across from him sat Ryun Nacht, the man whose name Zach had taken such pain to preserve, alongside Naha's. Carving it into the mountains, into stone. There had been a lot of there, the ramblings of a dwindling mind. Many things he still didn't understand, others he lacked context for. But now, he had an opportunity to learn more.

"You don't remember anything before Hastur captured us?" Ryun asked slowly.

The woman sitting next to Ryun—Erdania—nudged him.

"We told you about it," she said.

She and the rest knew, not everything. He hadn't been in any real shape to communicate back then. Ryun had been dead, so Zach understood him wanting to learn.

For a moment, he wondered why she was here. But then again, Zach had brought Naha. Mostly because he still needed her to keep him anchored. Just because he had rectified his issues, it did not mean that it had all been fixed overnight. He still... spaced out, got obsessed over various Aspects. Even now he was having trouble not turning all of his attention on Ryun, or rather the power inside of him. He couldn't feel it, not exactly. It was... his skill, **|I Focused And Saw All Flaws|**. It didn't just show him the flaws in the world around him, it also let him glimpse things beyond what was ordinarily apparent. Why or how, he didn't quite understand yet. Perhaps all of existence had some innate flaws to it that he could detect, or perhaps he was mad and imagining things. Regardless, he pulled his mind away from those thoughts with an effort.

The silence had stretched almost uncomfortably, so Zach spoke.

"No, not in the manner you are thinking," Zach said, then because he didn't want for any misunderstandings, he explained to him what had happened to him. He didn't go into details, of course. He just told them that he had seen through Hastur's illusion, and that the Dome Leader had wanted to torture him with eternity for it. Zach didn't actually remember that, he had read it in the stone. He told them of all the time he had spent alone, and how he had lost himself.

“Well,” Erdania started. “I am grateful that you’ve managed to overcome it. You saved all of our lives.”

Ryun on the other hand had a different look on his face. “So much time,” he said almost wistfully. “Such an opportunity is—”

“—A horrible thing to happen to anyone,” Erdania interrupted.

Ryun paused, but didn’t respond. Zach could see that he didn’t share the same sentiment. In some ways, Zach didn’t either. He had gained the power he held because of it.

“You wanted to talk with me,” Ryun said. “What about?”

“I want you to tell me about us,” Zach said. “Who we were to each other, what happened on Earth, everything.”

Naha had told him what she knew, which was what he had told her before. He didn’t know how much his hate had tainted the story he told her, but he would like to know both sides.

Ryun tilted his head, his expression wary.

“Oh,” Erdania spoke. “This is going to be that kind of a conversation then.”

As Zach turned to look at her, she leaned over the table and pulled out glasses and a bottle of something dark. She stood up and slowly, with great care and grace poured each glass while humming softly. There was... something about the act that echoed to him, a calmness that settled in his bones. Everyone around the table was almost entranced by it.

“Come now,” she said and gestured. “Drink up.”

Everyone reached for a glass. Zach looked at the liquid in his glass suspiciously, he didn’t drink. Or at least he didn’t remember a time when he had. Slowly he raised the glass and drank it.

He nearly coughed. It was intense, and it burned as it went down his throat.

Erdania released a loud sigh of contentment. “Ahhh, there. That should cool everyone down.”

Ryun glanced at her, then smiled and nodded, something passing between the two of them that Zach didn’t understand.

“We,” Ryun started. “We were friends, once. Then we were enemies.”

He started the story at the beginning, even before the things Naha told him about. He told the story of children, two friends in a world far stranger than the one that Zach was in now. It was a story about friendship born

out of being different, and commonality. And then, the Framework arrived.

“Once we made contact with the Government, I left with Melody,” Ryun said slowly. “Perhaps that was my mistake, but I have never cared much for people. And I wanted to test myself against the world.”

He continued, giving him a short version of the time he spent wandering, their encounter with an ancient Aspect, and then founding a small town. He spoke about them being attacked, and all that followed after.

“After Melody died... A part of me died with her. The thing that was inside of my head was filled with grief, and I was filled with anger and rage. Some at everyone else for allowing something like this to happen, and some at myself for not being strong enough. For letting other people slow me down. I wondered if we would’ve been stronger if we hadn’t settled with other people.”

He shook his head. “That is the point where our paths diverged. You were protecting those who were too weak to protect themselves, and I cared nothing for those who couldn’t gain strength enough to survive. My grief, my wrath, resentment, and my disdain for all others grew beyond control. I devoured what was left of the Aspect inside of me, I changed its nature, and I went mad. I started killing anyone in my way, and we came to odds.”

He paused, and then spoke again. “I killed your wife, and child. Though I did not know it at the time. I had no patience for anyone, no care for any life in front of me.”

The story continued, as he was hunted across the world. As he made a deal with the Dealmaker, as the people waged a war against him. As he ended the world. And then the story came to its end, as they were transported to the Infinite Realm, the only two humans left alive.

Silence stretched, and Zach studied Ryun. There was no apology, there was no attempt to make excuses. And of course, there shouldn’t be. Things he had done had no excuses. Life was precious, and he had taken it.

“You know,” Ryun started after a while. “You could get your memories back; it is within Dealmaker’s power.”

“I know,” Zach answered.

“You don’t want them?” Ryun tilted his head.

Zach wondered how to explain it. “Do you remember your early childhood life?” Zach asked.

Ryun frowned. “No,” he paused. “Well, some things. A few impressions, emotions, scenes without context.”

“That is what my early life is like for me. The things that you have told me now are like that. Emotion, impressions, flashes without context. Why don’t you pay a price to restore your own early memories?”

He scratched at his chin, and then gave Zach an answer. “They are inconsequential memories; it isn’t the same.”

“Not for you, it isn’t. But on the scale of my life? It is the same,” Zach said slowly. He stood up, then inclined his head. “Thank you for telling me your side. It has confirmed things for me. I am who I have always been. I seek to protect. And though I stumbled and made mistakes, I always strived to protect others. The only thing that has changed is that I have more power now.”

He turned around and walked to the exit. There, he paused for a moment. “I see how we came to be at odds, Ryun. You are callous with lives; you look down on those who are not strong. Yet, you’ve fought Hastur, and for that, I think that there might be some hope for you.”

With that he left the room, Naha following closely behind.

Once they had walked for a few minutes, she spoke.

“How are you feeling?”

“I am well,” he said. “You don’t need to worry.”

“I always worry about you.”

“I know,” he smiled at her.

“Did you find what you were looking for?”

“I did,” Zach said slowly.

“You know,” Naha started slowly. “You could’ve punished him for what happened back then.”

“If I was this strong back then, yes,” Zach said slowly. “But the River of Time moves only onward, what has passed had been etched in the banks of the river far behind its first wave, it is history. And he has shown the capacity for good. And life is precious.”

Naha nodded her head, and didn’t say anything more for a few more minutes. Then she spoke up again.

“What now?”

“Now,” Zach looked at the sky as they left the mountain side. “Now we will do as Hitor had asked of us. Let’s see if we can find and gather Wardens.”

\* \* \*

## **Ryun**

As soon as Zach left the room, it was as if the air suddenly become lighter. Ryun let himself relax. He had seen Zach’s power when they fought Hastur, but now... There was so much power around him that it almost stifled the Essence surrounding him. And there was something strange that he could see with his sight. An Essence that almost seemed to be anchored on him.

“You alright?” Erdania asked him.

“Thank you for being here,” he told her. “When you told me that he had no memory, I wondered what I would face. But this... this is good.”

“Good how?” She asked.

“He is the same,” Ryun said with a sad smile. “He had just lost the naivety of youth. Of trying to be a hero and save the entire world.”

“And he is much stronger,” Erdania said.

“Yes,” Ryun smiled now, a deep void opening inside of him. An old sensation that he had nearly forgotten. “You know,” He started slowly. “When I came to this world and encountered people that were stronger than me, I was never really in awe of them. They, you, were all so much older you see. You had time to get your power, and I knew that I would grow and reach and eclipse them eventually. It was never a question of if, but when for me. And now... He is strong, someone who is the same age as me, someone worthy. Ah... I needed this, to push me more, harder. I need to get stronger.”

“Just like that?” Erdania smiled at him.

“Yes,” Ryun said slowly. But inside, he was glad. He had advanced, but there was more to power than just advancement. He wanted to stand at the peak, to grasp all the power that he possibly could. To most, his advancement would seem too fast, but those were their scales and their ideas about what growth should look like. He never accepted that as truth. His Path was his own, and he would grow beyond his once friend, beyond everyone.