

BELONGING

MARCH 2020 REQUEST STORY

BY CHALDEACHANGE



It had been a riddle that had perplexed Seox ever since at Stardust Town. How could he grow closer to others? The Erune man had chosen to atone for the sins of his past, yet didn't best know how to express that to others. Particularly to the Grandcypher's captain who had done so much for him. He didn't just want to be a weapon, not anymore. He wanted to be able to help others using other skills. Could he be kind like Tweyen? Reassuring like Fif? These were traits the Eternal just didn't really know how to best integrate into his daily life.

That was why he'd asked the captain to drop him off here. What had seemed like a small, unsuspecting forest island actually housed a secret grove known by many on the next island over. Within was a shrine meant to grant wishes -- which was a supernatural belief well beyond Seox's usual scope but he thought perhaps the peace and quiet might do him so good. Inspiration could be found in the strangest places after all.

A blue sky was posed as the ceiling to the enclave, forests acting as its walls. Cradled in the center was a number of stone steps that reached a star crafted from marble, age having seen one of the five points wear off. He knelt before the store as instructed by one of the rumor hunters that had informed him of this place, one fist planted on the ground as the other rested on a raised knee. Seox lowered his head, and in response his Erune ears flattened in kind.

He just had to voice his wish mentally once he'd taken this pose? What a childish thing to try. The man couldn't imagine how foolish he might have looked were anyone watching, yet he closed his eyes and followed through regardless. *'I wish to be close to the captain, perhaps like a sibling might'*. Lyria was a good model for that relationship; she very

much acted like the captain's sibling. They were very close. It was the kind of closeness he couldn't imagine sharing with anyone else.

Seox, with his eyes closed as they were, could not see the star he was wishing to glowing gold. The warmth of the light did tickle his eyelids however, and before long he found himself beset with an unprompted weakness before passing out entirely, torso slouched against the rocks.

Dizziness was all that claimed the youth when he stirred once more, clearing lit not by the sun he'd last witnessed before but the pale light of the moon. Seox opened his eyes before he raised his head, and all he saw was his arm extended limp against stone as he rested on his shoulder. What was the time? The Grandcypher was meant to retrieve him from the island at midnight, which meant if it was later than that they'd surely come inland to search for him. He didn't want to be an inconvenience.

Once he'd risen to his feet, while dusting debris off his clothes he noticed he couldn't place the source of a weakness he was feeling. **“Was this the same force that had knocked me out?”** That too was a valid question. He hadn't decided to just take a nap on the rock stairs, he'd fallen unconscious despite his best intentions. Perhaps it was poison? There were fauna on this island he'd never seen before and so that was a valid guess, although if true one that would require he find the crew soon.

So despite his questions Seox pushed into the brush towards the pickup point. If his viewing of the stars was correct it was roughly 11:30pm, which meant he had half an hour. With his body so fatigued it would be a difficult trek, but one he had to make all the same.

He'd only gotten about five minutes into his trip when realization dawned that more was just amiss than his sudden lack of energy and woozy demeanor. He'd been actively using his finger-less gloved hands to push plant brush out of his path, yet he had no choice but to pay more attention to them thanks to the fact that said gloves were loosening. The Erune had assumed the cause to be the traction from pushing the plant-life at first, but at one point he swatted away a bug in front of his face and his right glove came right off, exposing the hand in its entirety.

It was different. Telling as much had been a difficult task with only the light of the moon filtering through the trees above to illuminate the ordeal, but once his glove was free he could tell. Fingers were slender and the soft glow of the flesh upon them could not be overstated for they were typically so calloused from a life of violence. Seox's entire hand looked misshapen against his wrist, looking much smaller than was

needed for his arm... but before his eyes he could see the width of said wrist undergo collapse to better match, phenomenon pulling into the body of his arms as well. The glove on his second hand soon fell off of its own volition.

“Could this really be the work of poison?” Examining the finely cut nails upon his fingers, he still progressed through the woods regardless. The more serious this became the more certain he was he had to find the captain sooner rather than later. He pressed on even as those cute fingertips were slurped up by his sleeves, shoulders crunching in and leaving the lengths of his arms too short for his jacket.

A bare foot escaped the confines of his boot and planted itself on the cold soil, shocking the man somewhat. His boots were normally fastened properly, so was this an effect of whatever was shrinking his hands and arms? No, it was very clear that his level of sight had begun to decline as well. He didn't need to see his arms to know that he wasn't merely shrinking; muscles had greatly diminished as well, and that was a consistent trend throughout his torso and legs.

Toes felt like they were cramping up momentarily as they wriggled and collapsed into smaller, cuter shapes that were dirtied by the ground. His heels became sharper in shape, but there was no doubt that the bottoms of each foot had lost the years of hardship he'd put them through while working as an Eternal. Ankles were narrow now, just as his ankles were, and as the weight of his hips collapsed so too did pants fall to his ankles. It was fortunate that Seox had already shrunk so much that his jacket covered what was essential, and the two belts around his waist barely hung onto those waif-ish hips of his with a little help.

Said help came in the form of his rear. Despite how lacking in design it had been even once he'd reached pseudo-adulthood now it jut out just the slightest bit. A gentle curve in his back from newly born posture made it stand out all the more, and looking at his thighs it was easy to see why. The design of his lower body was quite evidently feminine. Not in the sense of an adult, but perhaps closer to a girl on the cusp of puberty. His thighs were a little plump, legs smooth and hairless without the need to shave.

Seox didn't notice that his hair had begun to glow blue under the moonlight. That wild mane he typically adorned losing its fluffy luster as hairs became finer and straight, and above all else *longer*. It fell way down his back, far past that perky little butt of his and towards his ankles. When he lifted his feet to pull them out of the pants that hung at his ankles he could feel them tickle the back of his legs.

But Seox also tripped in this moment and caught himself against the bark of a nearby tree, a girlish squeak escaping his mouth in the process. He was momentarily disoriented as all of the sound around him seemingly shut off only to come back on in a quieter, groggier fashion. This was thanks to his furry Erune ears flattening and merging into his skull, sound only restored when small human ears sprouted under his long blue hair on the sides.

“What... What is happening t-to me!?” His ability to remain calm had been shattered and it was inevitable he’d squeak out his frustration. Paralyzed by fear, the boy looking to only be twelve or thirteen at best now, and based on his visage one could even wonder if he was even a boy. Eyes showed exhaustion and fear, both wider and as blue as the boundless sky with dainty lashed accessorizing them, and he spoke with pouty lips.

When he thought all hope was gone, that was when he heard it.

“SEOX!?! Where are you, Seox!?!”

It was the sound of the captain’s voice! They must have landed early and were looking for him! His hope and been reinstated and he managed to push himself off the tree once more. The voice was close, so he just had to push a little more! Then he could be beside his *dearest captain* again!

Moving with just his jacket to keep him covered was cumbersome, but the discomfort was coming to an end as the weight of the leather began to lift. Layers of cloth melded together as the material all lightened towards the same shade of white, the lower hem fluttered open into a skirt that exposed his thighs while sleeves evaporated almost entirely, the bulk making golden armlets around wrists while leaving as high as his shoulders bare. In the center of what would become his dress was a golden winged pendant, familiar in design, with a bright blue gem affixed in the center.

The dress hugged the boy’s torso tightly, and through it the narrow nature of its new design was fully displayed. His chest was the slightest bit puffy thanks to budding breasts, but it wasn’t really a concern for him. He didn’t really envy the others girls or *any...* Since when did thoughts like these plague his mind? No, he had to push to find the captain.

She had to.

The change in her mental state reflected her physical one, as remaining masculinity was finally stripped from her body and she broke through

the trees to find herself caught by none of than the captain herself, Djeeta. But the name Djeeta had spoken confused the girl immensely.

“Lyria? I thought you were behin--” Lyria? Had the captain just called her Lyria? No, that was impossible right! She was... Lyria! Er... No, Lyria wasn't an Eternal, and she'd been an Eternal. No, she was an Eternal! She was *Lyria* and she'd come out here to... Why *had* she come out here? **“--behind me?”** But Djeeta's confusion was surely warranted, because behind her Lyria was standing with a rather shocked expression. Which only left the Lyria in Djeeta's arms befuddled as well. For as much as she'd been resisting the idea that she wasn't Lyria, she couldn't remember who else she could be. And seeing the original? Just made her feel like that one was an impostor!

Both Lyrias went **“AAAAAAAAAH!?”** at the exact same time while pointing at one another, practically bursting Djeeta's eardrums. But then that second Lyria? The one that had been behind the captain? She suddenly wasn't there, and neither Djeeta nor the new Lyria could remember her being there in the first place. Instead there was... Ferry? When had Ferry-san gotten there?

Though it would be super confusing later when they realized there were two Ferrys wandering around, it was easier to theorize because they were ghosts.

But Djeeta and 'Lyria' would always continue to wonder:

Just what had happened to Seox?