

NAYRA

Nayra wandered around the palace, trying to get her head in order. The conversation with her sister had left her in a state of shock. She had always known that there might be consequences for abandoning her duty. But she hadn't really thought that they would go as far as to want to kill her.

Her sister's words came to her, echoing inside her mind.

"The people back home will tire of waiting, and they will send someone to kill you. They take honor and loyalty seriously. You were not thrown out of our faction, you abandoned it. The only reason you aren't dead yet is because of our parents, and that will not hold them off for too long. The rest of the Family will side with the faction, they will not want to leave you here to sully our name. If they decide that you are a danger to the Family name, not even our parents will be able to stop them."

Nayra had never known that there was such a schism inside the Family. They had always seemed so unified, although, now that she thought about it. It wasn't like she knew her family, not really. She had seen every one of her thirty two siblings, but she didn't really know them. She had a better relationship with some, those who had come home more often while she was growing up, but others were strangers to her.

To learn that her own family would be willing to have her killed, it made her... angry. And it made her feel right for her decision. She didn't want to be a part of the Order, nor did she want to be a part of a Family like that. She had a new place here, a new family. One that she cared about a lot more.

And yet... she knew that she couldn't just sever all connections with them, no matter how much she wanted to. With just a slight effort of will, she could speak with her twin, she was never going to be separated from Reyla. And with everything that Daria told her, she knew that just her presence here was brining danger to everyone.

Daria hadn't spoken anything clearly, she hadn't revealed anything about the Empire, even when they were in a private room. It was standard procedure, one never could know what kind of powers someone else had.

But she had told her that there were ways for her to get the Family and the Orders of her back. She only needed to show them that her presence here held great value. Her being a Sect Leader was a step in the right direction, but Daria suggested more. Something that she could show to the others as a clear benefit.

Nayra remembered the conversation, the argument between them.

“And why not?” Daria asked.

“What do you mean why not? I am—”

“I know, I’ve been watching. But Anrosh doesn’t bring anything to the family,” Daria said.

Nayra frowned. “I wasn’t looking for any gain, I like her.”

“Don’t be naive Nayra. You are an Ornn, part of one of the most influential families in the Empire. You do not get to live like everybody else. You have been granted resources, knowledge, and support by the family. You owe it to us to add to the family. And this is the easiest way to accomplish that.”

“I’m with Anrosh,” Nayra said through gritted teeth.

“I don’t see why it matters,” Daria said. “It isn’t like that prevents you from going after him. Mother has two husbands.”

Nayra turned away from her sister. She wasn’t going to deny that she hadn’t thought about it, but that was a year ago.

“I don’t know him,” Nayra told her.

“That can be remedied easily enough,” Daria countered.

Nayra shook her head at the memory, her sister didn’t understand anything. Ryun was attractive, but he was... he didn’t look at people like that. Perhaps if he had stayed here for the past year, she would’ve tried to get closer to him. But in the end, she knew that it wouldn’t have gone anywhere. He didn’t seem open to anything romantic. And besides, she wouldn’t want to change the past, as a result of the last year she had grown closer to Anrosh, and Nayra wanted to see where the two of them could go.

Still, she did understand partially what Daria wanted. A part of her was thankful to her. They weren’t close, but Daria was trying to help Nayra. To

make sure that she remained alive. For that alone, she was grateful to her. But that didn't change reality. She couldn't do what Daria asked. Nor could she do anything to help Daria's situation. Her sister was a prisoner, no matter how well she was being treated.

Daria didn't seem all that bothered, probably because she thought that she could get away anytime she wanted. Nayra had tried to convince her that she shouldn't try to escape, but she wasn't sure if Daria had understood. If there was one thing that Ryun despised above all else, it was someone breaking their word. And she had given her word that she wouldn't try to escape.

Nayra didn't know what she could say that would convince her to keep her word. After the conversation with her sister, she had left her in the guest quarters, guards standing watch in the hallway outside that wouldn't be able to do anything to stop her. Then she went to see the other two prisoners. The two Knights were... subdued, and silent. She didn't talk to them, but she could tell by their expressions alone that they were unsettled. Ryun had already talked with them, and the guards didn't know what he told them. Their cells were holes in the ground, reinforced with several layers of bars above them. Even with their greater stats it would be hard to get through that fast, and the guards on duty had cauldrons filled with an alchemical concoction based on Black Viper poison. Any escape attempt would not end well for them.

Now, Nayra was wandering through the palace, trying to figure out what she was going to do. Prior to Daria arriving she had decided to tell Ryun and Anrosh everything. But now... Now she didn't know if she would be putting them in more danger. Ryun was strong, but he wasn't strong enough to oppose the Orders or her Family. Not if they really decided that he needed to be taken care of. What Daria had suggested, it didn't sit well with Nayra for a myriad of reasons. But it would solve the problem, it would give the sect a direct connection to the Family.

Nayra didn't want to allow that idea to take root inside her head, she had made a choice to start a relationship with Anrosh and she intended to continue and see where that decision led.

Her wandering brought her to a familiar part of the palace. Guards in the hallways nodded as she passed, but she didn't pay much attention to them. She reached her destination and knocked. It was the middle of the night, her and Daria's conversation had been long and exhausting. And she needed someone to talk with.

She heard footsteps and a curse, then the doors opened and a sleepy Anarosh looked out. Her eyes widened as soon she saw her.

"Nayra, is everything alright?"

Nayra shook her head. "Can we talk?"

Anrosh blinked, looked down the hallway and hesitated. She seemed to think it over for a moment, but then she nodded and let her in.

Nayra walked into Anrosh's bedroom, it wasn't the first time, but it was the first time since the two of them got together. She took a deep breath as Anrosh led her to a couch on one side of the room, across from the bed.

The two of them sat down, next to each other and Nayra took a moment to look at her. Anrosh looked confused, and slightly hesitant. Nayra had noticed that, for some reason she had been acting weirdly. And it started when Ryun returned. Even now, Nayra could see that she was trying to stay away. She didn't reach out to touch Nayra as she often did when they were alone, she held herself stiffly just out of reach.

Nayra wanted to ask about that, but right now she had other things on her mind.

"You know about my sister?" Nayra asked.

Anrosh nodded. "Yes, Ryun told us. Your people sent her to spy on you, right?"

"Yes, and to kill me if I had revealed things that I shouldn't have."

Anrosh blinked. "What? They would really kill you?"

"I didn't think that they would, Daria convinced me otherwise," Nayra sighed.

"But why? I mean, I know that your faction likes to keep their dealings a secret but..."

"You don't know much about who they are." Nayra smiled weakly. "I planned on explaining everything, you know, but now..."

Anrosh looked at her intently. "I know that Ryun said that you don't need to tell us unless it would impact the sect, but... do we need to know?"

"Oh, yes. You need to know. But if I tell you anything I will be betraying my family, and they might kill me for it."

"I don't think that Ryun would let them do that," Anrosh said slowly.

Nayra chuckled. "Oh, I have no doubt that he would try to protect me. I've seen the lengths that he went to when someone threatened what he considered his. But... I don't think that he could keep me safe from this."

Anrosh glanced up, her eyes focusing as if she was looking at something. "I used to think that way once, but every time someone came after me or the sect, he prevailed. I think that you are underestimating just how strong he is."

The tone of her voice, the awe, the affection in it, made her feel jealous. Anrosh had denied that she had any kind of romantic feelings toward Ryun, and Nayra believed her, and yet. It almost seemed like she felt something even deeper than that for him.

Nayra didn't answer Anrosh's words, instead she reached out to Anrosh. She wanted to touch her, to feel her, she needed her. She didn't know what to do, caught between her new life and her old one. She just wanted to forget about her responsibilities, to enjoy her time with the person she cared about. She wanted to be close to her and just give herself over. But as her hand touched Anrosh's she moved it away.

Hurt, Nayra frowned. "What is it Anrosh? You've been acting weird all day, ever since Ryun came back."

Anrosh looked startled. "It's nothing."

"We've been hiding around the palace every day, kissing and touching, and suddenly you don't even want to touch me. And it all started once he came back."

Anrosh's eyes turned wide, her eyes looking around the room as if she was searching for someone spying on them.

Nayra's eyes narrowed. "Is this about Daria? The fact that she had been spying on us for months?" She asked, then shook her head. "No, we didn't know about that when you started acting weird. What is wrong Anrosh?"

Anrosh didn't answer. She looked... embarrassed? Nayra moved forward and grabbed her hand.

"Didn't we agree to be together? Why aren't you talking with me?" Nayra asked.

Anrosh looked down, avoiding her gaze.

"It is about Ryun after all," Nayra concluded. "Did you lie to me, before? Do you care about him more than..." *me?*

Anrosh shook her head. "No, it's not that. I'm sorry," Anrosh sighed and then moved closer, meeting her eyes. "I didn't mean to make you feel this way, it is... it does concern Ryun but I don't know if it is my place to tell you. On the other hand, he never really was bothered with hiding his power, so maybe it doesn't even matter."

"What are you even talking about?" Nayra asked, now completely baffled.

Anrosh took a deep breath, then looked around. "If you don't want me to tell her, you might as well let me know."

Nayra blinked, looking around, imagining a hundred different scenarios. "Anrosh? Are you okay?"

After a few seconds, she spoke again. "I guess that it is fine then. I didn't mean to make you feel like that," Anrosh looked at her with a guilty expression. "I am just not comfortable with others watching us be close, I was embarrassed, and well... Ryun, he can... uh, see us."

"What?" Nayra blinked, that was not what she was expecting.

"He has a power that allows him to monitor everything in a large range around him. He just... sees everything. And he can hear everything, well not really hear. He explained it once as feeling the vibrations in the air that people make when talking, and just understanding what they are saying."

Nayra tilted her head, thinking. *Was that how he found Daria?* She wondered. She knew that her sister had a power that allowed her to leave her body and walk around without it. Daria didn't know how Ryun found her, and she had asked Nayra to tell her, but she didn't know either.

"That... you were embarrassed?" Nayra asked slowly.

“Of course I was!” Anrosh exclaimed. With her red skin, it was hard to tell when she was blushing, but Nayra was pretty sure that she was at this moment. “He is probably listening in to this conversation right now!”

“Wow,” Nayra said. “That is quite some invasion of privacy.”

“It’s not like he can help it. He just... takes everything in,” Anrosh said.

“Are you sure that he is watching?” Nayra looked around, as if she could somehow detect his presence.

“If he is in the city, probably yes, maybe even if he is outside of it,” Anrosh said.

“He has that much range?” Nayra asked, impressed.

“Oh, yes. He could monitor the entire Wolf’s Grove town while he was just in the Lord Real. Now? I’m sure that he could monitor much larger area,” Anrosh said.

“So,” Nayra looked in her eyes. “You didn’t want him to know about us? Did you think that he would object?”

“I... No, I don’t think so. I was just...” she shrugged.

Nayra leaned closer, close enough that she could feel Anrosh’s breath on her skin, that she could hear and see her breath quicken. “So, I guess that he already knows, and we don’t need to hide anything from him.”

“Nayra,” Anrosh whispered.

“I’m sure that he will do us the courtesy of not watching, or maybe he likes that. I don’t mind giving him a show,” Nayra leaned down and kissed Anrosh, her hands moving beneath her robe and touching her skin.

Anrosh sighed in pleasure and Nayra pushed her down on the couch. She just wanted to forget about everything. Her family, the Empire, the secrets that she held and the threats to her life. She just wanted to enjoy the moment.

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RYUN

Ryun sat on top of the palace roof. He pulled his sense back, focusing on conversations in the city as Nayra and Anrosh moved to the bed. It made the two of them fall into the background, so he wasn't really focusing on them. His subconscious still saw everything. He debated going out of the city to give them more privacy, but then... he hadn't done so for everyone else in the city. He did try not to focus on the more private moments. But it was the price of his power, one that he was willing to pay.

In his head, he thought on Nayra's and Anrosh's conversation, on the reveal of their relationship. He hadn't expected that. When he realized what was happening, what the two of them had, he'd felt a pang in his chest. It was... a dull ache, an emotion that he recognized. He was still surprised sometimes by actually feeling things. He had spent so long with the wall inside his head that he had forgotten how it could feel.

He was... jealous and hurt, yes, but it was a faint pain. Yet, it took him a while to identify why he was feeling that at all. The cause of the emotion was their relationship, that much he was certain. For a moment he had been frightened that he had feelings for one of them and that he hadn't even realized, but that wasn't it. For Nayra he felt respect, she had made a choice and was willing to follow it through. She stumbled a bit, but he had no doubt that she would make the right choice. She grew stronger, and wanted to grow stronger still. He closed his eyes and remembered how she looked. She was attractive, her red hair glorious. But, Ryun hadn't known much about her then, and he didn't really know much about her now. Only her drive, and there was more to a person than that.

Anrosh, she was different. He was much more attached to her. She was his only real friend. Someone who he trusted implicitly. Perhaps in time he could've grown to love her in a romantic sense, but he was... damaged.

His jealousy hadn't been because he felt like he lost one of them, it was because of what the two of them had. Someone who they were close to, a partner in all things. Something that he no longer had.

They reminded him of it. He turned his mind to his Void Storage, at the white sphere lying there. With an effort of will he pulled it out and it dropped into his palm. It was sitting there comfortably, and he looked at it.

Perk Stone
One half of the Essence of the Twin Aspect of True Death. Upon use, this will grant the user the perk; Eternal Huntress: Scythe.

It was the proof that Melody was gone, that she was dead. The two halves of the Aspect were linked, he had known the moment it happened. Yet, this piece remained, a perk stone. He had checked the auction and asked around. No one knew anything about Perk Stones, they didn't exist here. And yet, in his hands was the second half of one whole. He knew that as long as one side of True Death remained, so would the other. They were one.

Ryun looked at the white sphere in his hand, and he felt pain in his chest rear back up. Tears trailed down his cheeks, and then turned to mist as they went. Some part of him was surprised that he could even cry, but it was a small thing compared to the pain in his heart.

As Nayra and Anrosh indulged in each other, as they embraced each other, the only thing that Ryun felt was cold and pain. He sat on the rooftop, and cried for what he had lost.