

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

And here we are with the climax of this arc! Hope you got some popcorn... and some tissues (not for that reason you pervs...)

**Honestly, I am not one to listen to music while reading or writing, but this time around I have to admit I think some of Attack on Titan's amazing OSTs fit extremely well certain parts.**

**So I will give you a suggestion on what to listen to from where Lakyus wakes up in her POV (you will clearly understand what I am talking about) and change OST each time there is a change of POV.**

- **XL-TT**
- **body motion**
- **E · M · A**
- **Bauklötze**
- **Light & Shadow (by Hiroyuki Sawano not from AoT but perfect)**
- **Omake-pfadlib**
- **eye-water**

**Hope you enjoy the read! See ya in the end note!**

## Chapter 97: Song of the Sky-Riders and the Black Rose (part 7)

Rayne snuggled under the covers of his sleeping arrangement, calling it a bed was a bit too pretentious even for him. He knew his body was trying to wake him up, and he probably should listen, but he was just too warm and comfortable to care right now.

After all, outside was freezing cold and he was being sandwiched between two very soft and inviting heat sources.

Having Arche back was a saving grace when it came to his sleep quality but also... the unexpected contribution of Ash was not something to be underestimated. The older girl had warmed her way into their sleeping arrangement shamelessly. Not that he had anything to complain about, mind you... the black haired girl had taken a part of his heart for herself in little over two months. The speed of his developing feelings almost made him wonder if he was just an easy guy.

He remembered his father saying once that love was the language of youth, that was until his mother tapped him a tad too hard on the back of his head with a pan, lamenting how Randel was trying to turn their son in some kind of player.

Rayne did not understand his mother's point very much even now. What could he even do if his heart felt so strongly for more than a person? And for very different reasons no less?

Arche was prim and proper, a true lady who held herself up to the standards of nobility, even though she had the intelligence of understanding when and how her behavior needed to be adjusted. He always thought she was adorable when she got flustered, or when she wanted something but wouldn't say it because of her upbringing, eliciting her to pop out that adorable pout of hers.

Ash, on the other hand, was the exact opposite. He had misread her when they first got to know each other, nervous and shy as she looked, once she got a bit of confidence around him she showed to be anything but that. She was proactive and adventurous, a true tease... and a shameless flirt, Arche's own words that he had to agree with.

They were two very different people, and yet they bewitched him all the same. Maybe his mother was right... maybe he was really turning in some kind of player... No! He would never want to hurt either of their feelings! He rather zap himself with his own [Lightning] a hundred times than make any of them weep over him.

“You awake?”

He heard the raspy voice of Ash whisper from behind him.

“Yeah.”

He whispered back as he felt two hands sneak under sleeping clothes and start gently massaging and scratching his back in a very pleasant way, making him hum in appreciation at the unexpected gentle contact.

“W-what are you doing?”

He stuttered out, feeling heat creep out his neck and face.

“You gave us such a good back massage yesterday evening... I could not help but repay the favor... also, you should keep your voice down, you wouldn't want Arche to wake and find out, now would you?”

He gulped at the tomboyish girl's sultry words. She had gotten a lot bolder after their time in the hot spring a month ago, and he did not experience this level of pursuit from anyone ever before.

“B-but... I...”

He mumbled out nonsense as he did not know how he should react to any of this.

“A-Arche is not going to wake up anyway... she sleeps like a log, I struggle to wake her every time.”

He defaulted to trying to changing the subject even if shivers of pleasure continued to crawl up and down his spine like the hands of the wyvern-rider.

“Oh? Is that so? Are you telling me this because you plan on doing something naughty with me while Arche sleeps next to us?”

The mental image those words caused a very... unpleasant reaction in his body. Or it would be better to say, dangerous reaction.

“B-bold words for someone who d-didn't even have their f-first kiss, t-till I came around.”

He tried to fight back before he was teased into oblivion. He had still some personal pride after all.

“Oh, if you are so experienced, why don't you show me how it is done?”

Oh, now she had done it!

Rayne rolled over now facing the black haired girl, staring into her eyes intensely as he closed the distance between their faces, prompting her face to flush and slightly back off.

“H-Hey, I-I was just j-joking...”

Apparently, inexperienced as she was, she could not take it nearly as well as she could dish it out... and that would cost her.

Rayne did not relent in his silent advance, wanting this advantage to last as long as possible. Putting her on the back foot for once in a while.

“N-no... stop... my heart is not ready.”

He was just starting to enjoy his upper hand when he felt a movement behind him, which made his blood grow cold to the point he wouldn't be surprised if it turned ice solid.

“What the hell are you two doing?”

The icy and merciless tone in Arche's words was a good indicator her question was rhetorical at best and she already had quite an idea of what they were doing.

“H-he forced me!”

Apparently, the death glare of Arche caused even the usually prideful Ash to buckle and push him under the running cart.

“I-I didn't start it!”

He tried to desperately defend himself, but by now Arche's hand had already found her catalyst.

“Die, you scum.”

And with those dead cold words, the hard reinforced wood descended upon him.

{Lakyus' P.O.V.}

The young woman was deep in thought.

She had ten days, ten days before the final deadline.

And yet, the result was the same.

She had trained like crazy. Everyone did. She could proudly declare that everyone of them had exceeded even her best predictions.

But it wasn't enough.

They would still lose.

What kind of monster was this S'hiraihyo?!

They planned it all. An ambush that would cut off one of his wings to prevent him from using his greatest advantage, flight. Rayne and Arche assured her that they could perform the necessary magic without problems at least three times each if they only used 3<sup>rd</sup> tier spells, and in case had scrolls in reserve, even if they would be less effective. Her, Leians, Zaryusu, and Riyuro could engage the enemy once it was forced down missing a wing, and Vulmitar could support them from above.

How? How could that not be enough?

No matter how many times she asked, Kealin's answer remained the same.

Absolute defeat

...

She couldn't accept that!

Even if she had to stay here another three months, or however much time it took. She will win!

It was no longer a matter of pride, or conviction, or even ideals.

Her eyes darted to the black-haired woman that made her heart flutter for the last month.

She observed as Kaelin played with her younger brother, a serene smile on her face as she moved the wooden toys around and made weird sounds for her younger brother, whose eyes sparkled every time his big sister did something new.

Lakyus could not fail, she absolutely would not fail!

She needed to protect her at any cost!

Was this the fated love many of her novels spoke of? Those books she never paid much attention in her childhood and that she read out of pure boredom while still living in her estate?

Till now, the only one she thought she loved was Renner, but that was a love born of friendship, an attachment to someone who she felt like understood her and wanted her around.

This, this was different. Kaelin made her heart yearn and tremble for her. All the nights full of passions they spent together ever since that first fated moment.

Those stolen intimate touches she shared with no one else in her existence, the way those purple eyes lit a fire inside her every time they focused on her. So beautiful and yet so full of sadness, as if that might be the last time they would be together.

Lakyus wanted to protect those eyes, that small smile, those lips that captured hers and held her in an unbreakable grip she would never wish to escape.

It was so absurd, even her goal of freedom and peace seemed to fall behind compared to her desire to be with Kaelin. The young

woman who gave her back a piece of herself so she could capture Lakyus in her entirety.

No one ever managed to fix her with words.

Satoru inspired her.

Renner advised her.

But no one other than Kaelin ever fixed something broken inside her.

“Hey, something wrong?”

Lakyus almost jumped in place as the familiar voice called her out.

She had been so busy ruminating in her own thoughts that she completely missed Kaelin approaching her now that her younger brother had been taken away by their mother.

“I... just needed to talk.”

Lakyus felt her muscles tense up in preparation for the same discussion she had planned a hundred times in her head the night before.

“What about?”

The older girl inquired tilting her head in a way that reminded Lakyus of the girl’s wyvern when it was confused. The comparison making the anxiety she was feeling start to decrease.

“We are still going to fail, aren’t we not?”

Kaelin did not answer her question. Lakyus did not need her too, after all the answer would be the same as yesterday.

“Kali... I don’t want to leave you here... please...”

She promised herself she would not cry, but her voice was starting to break. She felt a hand squeeze her shoulder trying to reassure her.

“Hey, I’m here, don’t worry.”

Unfortunately that did little to assuage Lakyus’ fears.

“How can I not worry?! You are stuck here! With a threat looming over your heads! And I am too damn weak to do anything about it!”

For the first time in her life she found herself despising her own self, her own weakness. If she was stronger, if she was smarter... she would have resolved this situation.

But she wasn’t.

She wasn’t Satoru nor Renner...

‘Damn my pride!... if it is to save them, then I...’ she found herself cursing her own foolish choices once again.

She didn’t want to contact Satoru to not look like a fuck up, to not show how she learnt nothing from Azerlisia... to not bruise her personal pride...

How many lives was her pride worth?

The bitter question slithered in the back of her mind like a traitorous snake.

Kaelin closed the distance between them, wrapping Lakyus in an embrace and pecking her lips with hers.

“Calm down, you still got time.”

‘And it won’t be enough...’ Lakyus refrained from rebutting. Though, she had to admit, the gesture helped her nerves relax a bit allowing her to think straight for a moment.

“Listen Kali... I know our agreement was for me to take your brother and go away if I wasn’t able to match S’hiraihyo after three months of training.”

She began, the only safe path getting clearer and clearer in her mind, no matter how much she hated herself for having to resort to it.

“But I won’t fight him, and I doubt ten days will make a difference anyway... but I also don’t intend to run and leave you all to die here sooner or later.”

Kaelin seemed to be about to retort but Lakyus beat her to it.

“I will contact Satoru... the same man who brought down the White Dragon Lord... I am sure that I can convince him to come here and kill the Hyvern.”

The words tasted like bitter poison on her tongue. To have to resort to this... after all her speeches about how she would change the world... she was still the same scared girl that was faced with death in the tunnels of the Dwarven Kingdom.

Nothing had changed.

“Kyu... a-are you really not going to fight?”

The question took Lakyus aback, even though her cheeks still tinged red every time Kaelin used that pet name she came up with weeks ago.

She had no idea why the purple eyed girl asked her that, haven’t she said as much?

“Y-yeah... my goal and my pride are not worth having you all on my conscience when I know I could have done something...”

Kaelin released her from the embrace before turning around, giving Lakyus her back.

“I-I see...”

The blonde did not know what came over the wyvern rider just now, but she had her own thoughts of defeat tormenting her for now... and for once she just wished to spend some time alone to stew over all of this... and her failure.

She would take today to think over what she would say to Satoru. How to express her shamelessness even knowing what he was dealing with at the moment.

Truly... she was a horrible person.

Selfish, arrogant, shameless. It was no wonder even Renner got fed up with her at a certain point... and it all flew over her head till now that she was forced to confront her limits once more.

“Kyu... please hurry...”

She almost didn't hear the half-whispered words of the black-haired young woman. But, considering her mental state, she might have only imagined the words and the worry in them.

She really needed to sleep over all of this and ask Rayne or Arche in the morning for a [Message] scroll.

...

Lakyus didn't know when exactly she dozed off. She felt awful when she went to bed, a huge bitter lump stuck in her throat at the thought of what expected her the next day.

She didn't even recall what she was dreaming about, or if she was dreaming of something in the first place. All she knew was that her eyes flew open when she heard a strange and yet familiar loud sound.

She didn't recognize it at first, it was weird, a swoosh sound she could not point the origin off, only that it was familiar and all her nerves started tensing at once as a shot of adrenaline entered her system.

Even as her hazy mind was still trying to give sense to what her body was doing on instinct she blindly reached for her blade, shining like a dark star even in the pitch black of night.

She barely managed to grasp its hilt when the first screams came.

Without thinking twice she rolled out of her tent dragging a few pieces of armor with her free hand.

Everything was pitch black as that loud swooshing sound got ever louder to the point of being deafening. She scanned the sky in search of the moon, to at least get a reference light while donning her armor.

And yet, the moon seemed nowhere to be found as the screams got ever louder as more and more people apparently woke up and realized what she missed.

Finally she found it! The moon hanging in the sky... a bloody red moon... no, there were many red moons in the sky... and they were... moving?

Before her brain could connect the dots, a wave of fire ignited the sky, breaking through the pitch black sky like a meteor descending toward where the tribe's camp was located judging by

the intensifying screens and the fact numerous somethings caught on fire in the distance.

Before Lakyus even had time to react, a second wave of what she recognized as lightning crashed into a different place making the earth tremble under her feet.

As the horror of what she was witnessing dawned on her a wave of blue ice shining like crystals descended upon where she and her group were camping.

“EVERYONE! GET AWAY!”

She shouted as she dashed blindly in a random direction.

She felt two arms wrap around her, stopping her in her track and making her panic and flail her blade.

“BOSS! Keep that damn thing down!”

She immediately recognized the voice as Riyuro’s making her immediately stop trying to fight.

“R-Riyuro! W-what the hell is happening?! H-how did you find me?!”

She asked half shocked by her friend’s sudden appearance out of nowhere.

“Boss, I can see as good as you can during the day right now... and let me tell you... we are fucked! This giant fucker is even larger than that dragon lord bastard! We need to get the others and run!”

In hindsight that was a dumb question, but that also meant that Riyuro was their greatest resource so far.

“Go! Find Rayne and Arche! They should have scrolls capable of illuminating the area!”

She ordered and even without seeing him, she could feel Riyuro scowling.

“Lakyus! This is not the time to be a hero! That monster can annihilate us!”

She gritted her teeth, he was right, and she hated it.

But still... she would not back down... how can she live with herself if she ran using innocent people as decoy.

‘Those who flee to live and plan to fight another day are smart... but those who flee to fight another day while leaving their companions behind are only scum’ those were the words Satoru once told her. words she wanted to abide by.

“Flee if you want! But I will stand my ground! I will not let anyone else die for me!”

She proclaimed as three distinct roars split the sound of chaos, the giant beast flying over them causing a wind strong enough for Lakyus to almost lose her balance.

“You are one mad fucking boss! If we live, you will owe me for this!”

She heard Riyuro growl out before he was gone into the night. On her part, Lakyus immediately darted for the tribe’s camp, where the monster seemed to have his attention on, if she could help anyone escape, she would gladly do whatever she could.

{Riyuro’s P.O.V.}

“Where are those damn kids?”

The strongest Quagoa to ever live cursed under his breath as he searched around the devastated camp where his team rested till a few minutes ago.

“Leinas!”

He barked out as the human woman came into view. Something was wrong though, the woman was limping as she dragged something, or rather someone, behind her.

He immediately recognized the blonde hair of the magic caster girl, and the boy was not far behind as he was fussing over the girl.

“I have got the potions!”

The voice of Zaryusu cried out from amidst the icy mess that damn flying lizard with too many head left behind.

His team did not waste time as Leinas immediately grabbed one of the vials and downed it while Rayne poured another in Arche’s mouth.

“You two! Where are the scrolls?!”

He did not waste time as he approached the two casters, one of whom had received a wound cutting across her right cheek which was already closing thanks to the potion.

“I-In the tent.”

The boy stuttered out.

“Then go get them! the boss wants all this area illuminated as soon as possible, no one but me can fight in the dark!”

The two of them immediately darted off toward the icy spike now constellating the ruins of their camp.

“Where is Lady Lakyus?!”

Well, to say he did not expect the question was a lie, he was surprised it took the woman that long to ask where her charge was.

“That mad one went toward the tribe to aid them-“

He could not finish his explanation that the woman was already darting in the indicated direction before he grabbed her and forced her into place, much to the woman’s clear anger expressed through her classic death glare.

“Let me go!”

She demanded, as cold as the ice behind them.

“Boss got orders for us! Don’t forget the plan! Even if this is not the situation we expected... we can’t win if that fucker remains in the sky!”

He saw how much she despised his words. For all Leinas was often stoic, she could not help but show her emotions when it came to Lakyus. Riyuro knew she was a logical individual that would see his point, so he relented his grip, and indeed the woman did not dart away no matter how much she wanted to.

“Now! Where is that damn dragon?!”

For being the largest by far among their group the bastard was hiding himself well.

“Vulmitar shielded us all from the attack, I am not sure his condition-”

The lizardman was interrupted by the Quagoa’s annoyed growl.

“He better get here right now! His condition will be the last of his problems if we can’t get that thing down!”

Either by chance, or because he actually heard Riyuro's words, the spawn of the White Dragon Lord came out from behind the ice he was mimicking himself among.

Riyuro could see various, not very deep, cuts on the dragon's side. The fact the icy attack injured a being with such natural resistance to ice was a testament to its power. Luckily for them both of Vulmitar's wings did not seem to be damaged in the slightest.

"You could at least thank me for saving that furry arse of yours."

The Frost Dragon grumbled as he made his way toward them.

"I would give you a lordship or something but, as you know, I no longer have the title to do that... now, are you ready to probably go die horribly?"

His joke didn't seem to land well as the dragon just gave him a blank stare before lowering himself while probably muttering some curses under his breath.

"Zaryusu, go help Arche and Rayne and then find Lady Lakyus and give her support!"

Leinas ordered the lizardman who ran off, before climbing up the dragon following Riyuro's example.

"Never thought I would get to ride a Frost Dragon in my life..."

The Quagoa muttered, even though he apparently was loud enough for Vulmitar to hear.

"The displeasure is mutual, just don't get your fur stuck in my scales."

Vulmitar rebutted before leaping off and flying toward the burning camp. 'Sassy asshole' was all Riyuro could think as he held the dragon for his life.

Still, approaching without being able to see would be a hassle. Luckily the casters seemed to have been successful in their search as orbs of light started being shot in the sky. Riyuro could count at least twenty. He lowered his goggles to shield his eyes.

“What the fuck is that thing...”

Well, apparently Leinas had finally managed to see their enemy in all its monstrosity.

It was floating there, a chubby inferior body with three long necks and heads sprouting like evil branches, two wicked talons that seemed powerful enough to carve a mountain, and a swishing tale to finish the horrid vision.

Four wings allowed that black scaled monstrosity to fly, something he still had to wrap his head around. It seemed impossible for just four wings to support that mass... the thing was even larger than the White Dragon Lord and those wings were not nearly as big as his.

He shook his head. This was not time to ponder what was and wasn't possible.

“Well, what do you think Frost Dragon, still want to show that thing why your race is the rightful dominator of the skies?”

He asked mockingly, eliciting a growl from their current mount.

“Don't think I am so pathetic I would let the size of my opponent stop me, Quagoa! We dragons have nothing to fear from this inferior copies!”

The Frost Dragon roared before diving down toward their target currently busy burning, shocking, and freezing everything around it like the mindless violent beast it was.

The impact was loud and powerful. Almost enough for him to lose his grip. Vulmitar had completely slammed with his entire body over the midsection of the beast, causing it to lose its balance and start falling.

As soon as it was down, him and Leinas would not waste time in taking away its ability to fly.

But apparently they did not account for the possibility that the beast would reclaim his balance, managing to remain in the air even with Vulmitar atop him.

And to complete this utter failure, two of the three heads of the beast had turned toward them with a vicious look in those crimson eyes.

Riyuro recognized a look of a monster, and that was not it, that was the look of a dead fish. But before he could dwell on that any further or the monster decided to attack, a flock of wyverns swarmed the two heads like a group of angry bats, distracting them for the moment.

“GET OFF!”

The Quagoa yelled at the human knight as they both jumped off Vulmitar and onto the dark-scaled body of the beast.

“The wings! Cut off those damn wings!”

He yelled to his companion while Vulmitar launched himself into a fierce battle against one of the monster’s heads.

Riyuro almost lost his balance as he got close to one of the wings only to be saved by Leinas. He really needed to work on his battle stance on uncomfortable terrains.

“[Sanctify]!”

The woman yelled, imbuing her spear with holy magic which made the metal shine like a star.

“[Impalement]!”

She used her Martial Art to strike at the base of the flapping wing, recoiling when her weapon did not manage to cut into the stales.

“Shit!”

She cursed as the backlash of the hit almost made her lose her balance.

Seeing how there was no other option, Riyuro tried his luck, both using his fists and claws to tear through the scales to no avail apart some cracks and scratches.

Maybe if he had twenty minutes he could have ripped them off, but as it stood, he had no idea if he even had five minutes still! He tried not to look, but he had seen more than one wyvern fall with the corner of his eye. And them and Vulmitar were the only reasons why he and Leinas were not being burned, shocked, or frozen to death right now.

Their whole strategy, their entire plan hinged on them being able to take away this fucker’s ability to fly! Rendering it little better than a deadly garden lizard, still dangerous but not nearly as much as a flying one.

“DAMN IT ALL!”

Feeling the familiar rage of his younger years surge back from the pits of his stomach like a vengeful spirit, he gave in into his instinct and bit down on the scales with his trustful fangs. He bit down harder than he ever did, to the point he started to fear for

his jaw, something no respectable Quagoa would ever admit out loud.

He continued to bite down even as he felt a loud crack, unsure if it came from his teeth or the scales under them. all he knew was that he needed to bite harder.

With a sonorous sound of breaking stone, he felt the scales finally give away, as his teeth tore through them, dislocating a chunk nearly as large as his head that he proceeded to spit out. His felt his jaw throb and start hurting from the strain he put it through.

They had to pray to any god that existed that taking out a wing would be enough since he certainly could not repeat this miracle twice. That is, if they could even cut off this one in the first place.

“[Impalement]!”

Leinas’ spear shot out a second time burying itself deep into the gap he created.

The blonde immediately began to push her spear across the cartilage that attached the wing to the body. Riyuro did not waste time in helping her pull the spear across. With their strength combined, step after step, they managed to reach the final stretch, and with one final mighty pull the wing completely fell off from the body.

Riyuro barely had the time to take in a breath of relief when the miscalculation of their action came up to bite them in the ass.

This plan was thought out with in mind the fact that the beast would be grounded and kept grounded by Vulmitar. Now that they were in the air and had removed the monster’s only mean to remain in the air, there was only one possible outcome.

“VULMITAR! COME BACK!”

Apparently Leinas had realized the same thing as him as she cried out in panic for the first time since Riyuro could remember meeting her.

Though, the dragon either didn't hear her or was unable to answer in time as the beast began to shake and lose altitude.

But even in this situation, Riyuro could not help but notice how something was very wrong, and he was not referring to the fact they were falling.

Those eyes, the lack of reaction, the lack... ‘Oh, fuck!’ his eyes went wide at the realization and how he had been to single minded to notice sooner. And with the ground getting closer and closer, he might not get the chance to reveal his discovery.

“EVERYONE LISTEN! THIS THING IS-“

His breath was kicked out of him as the giant beast impacted the ground sending him flying off in a whirlwind of colors and everchanging shapes till all he could see was black and he could feel no more.

{Kaelin's P.O.V.}

She looked down as the worst enemy, second only to the accursed dragon lords, of her people plummeted to the ground. It was no surprise that the entire might of the three tribes was not enough to face such a monster, he swatted away wyverns like they were nothing more than flies.

Truly, a steed worthy of a God.

“They did it!”

Kaelin heard the excited and relieved voice of Lakyus coming from behind her ears. The two of them were currently riding Zephyra, the wyvern strangely had taken a liking to the girl... maybe she sensed her partner's feelings and adapted, after all they were smart like that.

Either way, the battle was yet far from being won. But this was a huge step in the right direction

She cursed herself, this was all her fault! She had all the signals she needed to realize something awful would have happened.

Initially she thought that her Talent was warning her of the outcome of Lakyus' plan. As the deadline came closer and closer, the sensation of dread became unbearable to the point she had to lose herself in the thralls of pleasure only to have a few minutes of relief from the constant doom lingering over her neck.

She felt like scum for using Lakyus for her own relief, but it wasn't like her feelings were fake. The positive and peppy girl had warmed her way inside Kaelin's heart all the same, sex or not. She just... pushed it a bit further, not that Lakyus seemed to mind judging from her- No! She needed to focus right now! She could not lose herself in pleasant memories!

“What is the next step?”

She asked the blonde.

“The most dangerous head for us is the fire breathing one! We need to incapacitate it as soon as possible!”

Lakyus explained as Zephyra descended toward the beast which was still trying to find his bearing after the fall. The dragon atop him did not seem to have suffered any damage as he was using

the momentary chaos to try and subdue one of the heads, freezing it over and shredding his scales with his magical breath.

“That’s Vulmitar for you! That monstrously powerful breath always comes in clutch!”

Kaelin almost felt like smiling at the girl’s excitement, but she could not still shake off the feeling her Talent constantly provided. As things were... they will not make it.

“Hold it down Vulmitar!”

She heard the voice of one of the young casters as they apparently were preparing their spells to capitalize on their friend’s momentary advantage.

But before they could shoot S’hiraihyo turned his remaining heads around and unleashed a wave of ice and lightning against the Frost Dragon, the power of which pushed him off the incapacitated head he was holding down.

“Damn it! Vulmitar!”

Lakyus cursed worriedly for her companion.

“Bring me down Kali! I need to help them!”

The rider did not hesitate making Zephyra land for just enough time to make Lakyus climb down before she took off, reaching the rest of her tribe, her father included.

“Father! We need to take down the fire breathing head!”

She cried out to her father and the warriors who were still hovering pretty high in the sky.

“Kali, what does your Talent tell you?”

The question floored the black haired young woman.

What was her father saying? This was not the time to use her Talent, choices were made by each second and she could not predict with certainty...

She stopped her mind in her tracks as the brutal truth downed upon her.

“You want to abandon them...”

The accusation lacked the fire of indignation she wanted to put in it.

“S’hiraihyo is not capable of following us right now, they can serve as a good decoy as long as they will last, we can relocate.”

There must be a mistake, this could not possibly be her father, her father would never even propose anything so... so... so vile!

“You would repay those who came to our rescue when they could have fled by fleeing at your first chance?! And you call yourself the Stormclaw?!”

She roared to her father for the first time in her life, raging like never before.

“I would see you, your brother, and your mother safe! Even if I have to live with your scorn for the rest of my life! I will gladly bear the price if it means you all can have a future!”

Her father roared back at her, regret and pain making their way into his tone, taking Kaelin aback. She never heard her father sound so defeated and miserable before.

But still... that was no excuse!

She looked down at the seven individuals currently fighting and putting their lives on the line in a war that had nothing to do with them.

At the girl who showed her that even the impossible could one day become reality.

“LISTEN EVERYONE!”

She shouted as loud as she could, catching the attention of everyone around her.

“I HAVE LIED TO YOU ALL! EVER SINCE I WAS A GIRL! I HAVE LONG AGO FELT INESORABLE DOOM APPROACHING US USING MY TALENT! I HID THIS FROM YOU ALL TO SPARE YOU THE SUFFERING OF KNOWING ALL WOULD COME TO AN END ONE DAY! NO ONE DESERVES TO LIVE THEIR LIFE IN CONSTANT FEAR!”

She shouted for all to hear, shocking most of the riders present. Her father said nothing, limiting himself to lowering his head. Kaelin was glad he at least spared her the pain of a confrontation.

“THIS! THIS IS THE ONLY CHANCE WE WILL EVER HAVE AT FREEDOM! IF WE FLEE NOW! MAYBE WE WILL GET TO LIVE ANOTHER YEAR! OR FIVE! OR TEN! BUT WHAT THEN?! WHEN S’HIRAIHYO WILL DESCEND UPON US ONCE MORE?! WILL WE ACCEPT OUR DOOM KNOWING THAT WE FLED LEAVING THOSE WHO WOULD HAVE AIDED US TO DIE?! FOR THAT IS THE WAY OF COWARDS! AND THE ARASHI ARE NO COWARDS!”

This was all she had, her trump card that she had never planned to play in the first place, until her father forced her hand.

“WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?! THE LAST WHO REACH S’HIRAIHYO WILL BE DEEMED THE MOST COWARD OF ALL!”

She recognized the raspy voice of her cousin Ashryn as she descended upon her steed flying straight for the beast below. Her father right behind her, either to join her or stop her, it didn't matter for that was the drop that broke the dam as the rest of the tribe descended following their example, roaring their lungs out all the while.

“Daughter... I truly hope you know what you are doing... for the good of us all.”

Her father said without praise nor condemnation in his voice as he made to follow the rest of their tribe.

...

They swarmed one of the three heads, the one that spouted lightning left and right. Even with their wyverns' natural defense to said element, it took only a couple of seconds of exposure to his magic breath to strike any of them down.

Their wyverns tried to aim at the beast's eyes, the only target that could be affected by their lightning breath. Blinding the beast, even if momentarily would allow them to gain a few precious minutes.

She could see with the corner of her eye the frozen head begin to spew its flames melting off the ice encasing it as it slid around like a blind snake.

She saw the frost dragon, bleeding all over, unleash another wave of ice toward the fire breathing head, trying to stop it from freeing itself only to be answered by a wave of ice from the only unoccupied head of the beast, which was stopped by a giant ice barrier, courtesy of the lizardman.

Damn it! That would not last long! S'hiraihyo's icy breath was too powerful!

Gritting her teeth, she veered and dived down toward the ice breathing head, Zephyra slamming into it and clawing at the beast's eyes, making it change his target from the dragon to herself. Her wyvern held itself with all her might to his face even as it started spewing ice in the air trying to hit Zephyra which would be safe as long as she held to his head.

Only problem was, that Kaelin herself could hardly hold as good as her own mount even more as the beast flailed his head erratically. It was only a matter of time before she was sent flying by one of its tugs.

She felt her hand lose her grip as she fell off her mount. Her tribesmen were used to falling, they all learnt how to fall properly and avoid damage since they were young, but from such a height... She could only pray as she brought her knees to her chest in hope of falling on a pile of snow to avoid major damage.

She closed her eyes, bracing for the impact, when she felt something grab her and tumbling down with her.

Her eyes shot open only to realize that the one who caught her, saving her life was none other than the blonde girl who didn't know when to give up.

“Hey there! Fancy meeting you here!”

Kaelin had no idea if she wanted to laugh or berate the girl for her terrible sense of humor.

She didn't get the chance to choose though, as the girl jumped up and reclaimed her signature blade she had abandoned to save the falling Kaelin.

“Now, let’s finish this!”

She cried out as her blade shined like the starred night sky as dark energy surged from it.

“[Dark Blade Mega Impact]!”

Kaelin felt the dark energy almost push her back as the wave of darkness shot out from Lakyus’ blade and stroke the neck of S’hiraihyo’s fire breathing head, sending dark scales flying in all directions as the whole appendage was brought low due to the strength of the strike and the added weight of the ice block encasing the head.

“[Icy Burst]!”

She saw the lizardman unleash his signature move, a wave of ice wrapping around the lower part of the best’s neck, locking it in place.

“Rayne! Arche!”

The blonde swordswoman roared as the two caster jumped out from their cover, their hand already extended with magic circles ready.

“[Penetrate Magic: Lightning]!”

“[Penetrate Magic: Fireball]!”

The two spells shot off like deadly darts, aiming for where the neck attached to the head. The explosion of fire and lightning that followed would have been a majestic spectacle if it wasn’t for the fact Kaelin was anxiously awaiting the result of their coordinated attack.

As the smoke of the first wave of spells cleared Kaelin felt her breath get caught in her throat at the sight of the target who

suffered no major damage apart from severe-looking burns, but the most important thing was that those spells managed to blow off his scales, leaving a large portion of flesh exposed.

Kaelin watched in some well-deserved awe as the two casters took out some pieces of paper that she deduced were the scrolls Lakyus had spoken of before.

Her theory was confirmed as they proceeded to unleash a barrage of spells, most of which she didn't even recognize, at the exposed flesh. She awaited for trepidation as spell after spell continued to impact the defenseless neck of the creature.

It almost seemed like the process lasted an eternity, but finally one of the explosions was followed by a loud thud as the head of the beast was blown off from the rest of its body, prompting the two casters to stop their barrage of spells.

“One down!”

She couldn't help but share in the excitement of Lakyus.

They did it! They managed to take down the most dangerous head of S'hiraihyo! They could win this! They could be free!

So why? Why did she feel such dread upon her? As if her doom was just around the corner?

“Everyone! Next is the lightning head! You two! How many scrolls do you have left?!”

Kaelin could not help but admire the level of leadership and professionalism Lakyus was displaying. For all the girl seemed very playful and aloof most of the time, she truly was a great leader capable of making everyone around her feel safe.

“We used little less than half our reserves!”

The blonde caster answered, receiving a nod of acknowledgment from their leader.

“I see! Then for the last one we will have to rely on-“

“THE FIRE HEAD!”

Lakyus was interrupted by the panicked shout of the boy caster who pointed his finger at something behind them.

They all turned around to see the headless neck rise up as if still alive as dark miasma erupted from the part they just blew off.

Kaelin looked in utter horror and despair as bones began to grow back till a draconic skull was fully formed again in a matter of seconds, two red hateful dots shining in its empty eye sockets.

“It’s... IT’S UNDEAD!”

Lakyus was the one to vocalize the horrific realization as the now revealed monster opened its jaw and unleashed a torrent of flames upon them. But before they could be roasted alive, a giant figure interposed between them and the attack.

The bloody frost dragon roared as an icy aura surrounded him trying to fend off the flames, with little success.

“[Arcane Shield]!”

Rayne cried out, trying to shield his comrade from the flames overpowering his defenses. The magic shield barely lasted a few seconds before breaking, but the boy immediately summoned another and another.

“Arche!”

Lakyus cried out needlessly as the female caster already had already pointed her hand toward the creature

“[Widen Magic: Fireball]!”

A huge wave of fire shot out toward the skeletal head of the undead blowing a good portion of it off and interrupting its torrent of flames.

“I can’t cast another of these! We need to leave! Now!”

The blonde cried out, but before Lakyus could answer her, the form of the dragon shielding them collapsed. He was scorched all over and multiple gashes on his body were bleeding heavily.

““““Vulmitar!””””

More than one voice cried out at the sight of their comrade’s collapse either due to exhaustion... or a grimmer fate, Kaelin could not say.

“We can’t leave him here!”

Rayne protested immediately even though the alternative was to stay and die with him.

“We can’t win this! We need to retreat!”

Arche cried out as she clearly panicked trying to step back while staring at the already reforming undead.

“And you would leave him to die here?!”

The boy rebutted vehemently completely offended and outraged at the mere proposal of that course of action.

“Stop it you two! This is not the time! We are leaving, but not without Vulmitar!”

Lakyus roared trying to restore some order.

“I will heal him! You two and Zaryusu need to give me some time!”

She ordered and, to their credit, the two casters immediately stopped any arguing as they moved to obey her orders.

“Kali! Get those potions!”

Lakyus ordered pointing at a sack in the snow. She immediately darted for it and turned back to return to Lakyus only to notice how the ice breathing head of the beast had turned toward them, Lakyus especially, who was non the wiser considering she was crouched down using her Divine Magic on Vulmitar.

“LOOK OUT!”

She yelled, leaving the sack there and running back to the blonde who just raised her head not noticing the open jaw of the monster. To Kaelin it almost looked like time had slowed down, she felt the erratic pumping of blood in her veins, her short, exhausted breath, the cold creeping over her exposed face, and most of all... she felt her Talent call... she was going to die.

She had always refrained from using her Talent secondary effect for her entire life as she felt it was a gross invasion on one’s freedom and free will. But for once... if this had to be her hand... she wished to go knowing the truth.

She barely reached Lakyus by the time the ice erupted toward them. She pushed her lover away from the stream, making contact with her in the process and activating her Talent to witness the future of the person she just touched.

A myriad of images invaded her mind all at once.

She smiled, at last, after 17 years she had seen it... a bright future, even if she was not pictured in it... it was enough for her...

A sense of relief flooded her system as her thoughts flew to her younger brother, if she only could... she would have liked to witness that smile... just one last time.

“Sorry Lu... your big sister is such a big dummy...”

And then everything became whiteness, coldness, and pain, till she felt no more.

{Ashryn’s P.O.V.}

The tomboyish girl had been fighting for her life like never before. Not that she had ever been in any fight to begin with... the pumping blood, the pit in her stomach every time the head of the monster turned her way, fearing she would be the next to be stroke down.

For all they were fighting with all they had, they couldn’t do much more than scratch those damned scales. That wouldn’t have been too bad if they would have just to serve as a momentary distraction. But whatever plan there was had surely gone to shit by now... ever since the monster grew back his decapitated head and revealed his horrid true nature.

It was not hard to imagine that none of this would have ended well for any of them.

That was a good run, but she will not go down without swinging!

“Layla! Aim for the-“

Her command was interrupted when a wave of ice tore through at least five wyverns, missing her by a hair... no, it did not miss her,

she felt a sharp pain on the right side of her head, she immediately brought a hand there instinctively only to find... nothing.

Her ear was completely gone, torn off completely by the attack of the second head that was now pointing at them.

They were already slowly losing against just one, now that two were pointed at them, even her intrepid and fearless heart could not help but completely plummet.

“There is no hope! Retreat! I SAID RETREAT!”

She heard the thunderous voice of her uncle, the Stormclaw, call for a full retreat.

Ash looked in the distance at the battle taking place between the last head and what remained of Rayne’s team. Thinking how now that they would flee, there will be nothing stopping the remaining two heads from focusing on that team, and if they were struggling with one alone.

‘Damn it!’ she cursed herself and the day she caught feelings for that cute green eyed idiot.

“Layla! Go!”

Her loyal companion did not hesitate and dived down toward the group of adventurers, ignoring the shouts of her uncle and father to stop.

She saw the now free heads of the beast turn toward their only remaining opponents.

“BEHIND YOU!”

She shouted at the top of her lungs, trying to warn the group of the incoming attack, but it was too late, the maw of one of the heads had already started spewing its ice.

In a desperate gamble she stirred Layla into slamming on it, to redirect the breath, succeeding partially only for the head to snap back and slam into them with a headbutt, sending the two of them falling ruinously onto the snow below.

She tumbled onto the ground painfully, but no pain was comparable to the one she felt when her companion crushed her lower half under Layla's weight.

She screamed, she screamed as if her whole body was on fire, for that was what it felt like.

She couldn't feel it, she couldn't feel her legs, or anything below her waist really.

She turned her head to make sure her companion was alright and make her get off her, but her words died in her throat. Most of Layla's head had been reduced to a red mush of brains, bones, and blood.

Her closest friend, her companion since as long as she had memory, the one she fed and loved... was gone.

She could not help it, the tears came alongside the ugly sobs. She couldn't even remember the last time she openly cried, but she didn't care less right now, she just wanted all of this to be over, for all of it to have been just a nightmare.

She looked up at the night sky, the dawn almost breaking over the horizon by now.

But most of all she looked at those dead cold red eyes fixed on her, the man opening to reveal crackling lightning.

The breath attack erupted toward her a second later, she closed her eyes, at least... this nightmare would come to an end.

There was no pain, she didn't feel any worse than she felt before, she slowly opened her eyes, only to see a figure giving her his back.

The figure of a boy she recognized.

“[Arcane Shield]!... [Arcane Shield]!... [Arcane Shield]!...”

She looked at him in awe, she could not help it, he was pouring all of himself in standing his ground. It was no wonder he had been the one to capture her heart.

“I will... [Arcane Shield]!... Save you!”

He cried out even as stray lightning scratched his face causing him to bleed all over.

A feminine cry tore through the air making Ash's gaze snap toward the sound only to see Arche struggling to maintain a defensive spell against the icy breath of one of the heads that apparently decided to focus on her.

“ARCHE!”

She heard the desperate call of the boy currently shielding her as he cried out his friend's, no, lover's name.

“What is everybody doing?! SOMEONE SAVE ARCHE!”

She could not help but absorb some of the desperation in the boy's cry.

‘Idiot! Is this how you want to die?!’ she had no idea if the words she screamed in her mind were meant for the boy or herself.

“Go! Save her!”

‘I don't want you to go!’

The boy turned toward her in disbelief even as he continued to cast his barrier.

“B-but-“

“She is the best at fire magic, which is the only thing that works well against undead! If you don’t save her, we are all surely dying!”

‘I don’t care! Stay with me!’

She could see Rayne battling in his mind at her words.

“There is no more time! Save her!”

‘Save me! I don’t want to die!’

She saw tears roll down the boy’s cheeks as he looked at her in defeat.

“And make sure she loves you right! Or I will come back to haunt her!”

‘Don’t leave me!’

The boy sobbed before casting one final barrier, his voice broken, as he suddenly disappeared in an instant, probably using the ability of his gown he so much adored talking about.

‘I am... so alone...’

The barrier cracked under the weight of the unrelenting assault of the lightning.

‘No, that’s not true... I have you with me...’

The barrier shattered in a million pieces as she closed her eyes, recalling the feeling of two arms wrapped around her as she slept.

‘Thank you, for loving me’

She smiled as she felt at peace, until she felt no more.

{Lakyus' P.O.V.}

She roared as a savage beasts as she swung her blade at anything in her sight.

She wanted to kill it!

This damn thing!

**THIS DAMN MONSTER!**

**IT MUST DIE!**

She didn't care how much it regenerated!

She would tear it apart all the times it will take to kill it!

The beast moved behind her. Another damned head approaching!

It opened its maw, but Lakyus did not care. If that thing killed her she would just climb out of her grave and kill it anyway!

This thing killed her!

It killed Kali!

Just like that, in an instant, in front of her eyes!

“[Icy Burst]!”

The wall of ice blocked the icy breath of the beast from reaching her.

Even with both his legs broken and unable to walk after being sent flying, Zaryusu continued to fight with all he had.

Such resilience would normally please her and even gain her admiration.

But right now her mind was completely controlled by her rage and bloodlust to consider anything else.

That singlemindedness would be her undoing as the beast grew tired of the interference and rammed its head right against the wall of ice, breaking through and directly hitting Lakyus, sending her flying.

She felt the hilt of her sword slip from her grip as the blade flew only the gods knew where, as she fell face down on the snow. Her entire body aching even as she forced herself up, trying to catch her breath after it was kicked out of her by the previous hit.

She felt a copper taste in her mouth and a dull pain in her nose. She apparently broke it and she was bleeding from some gashes.

But she couldn't care less. Even like this, with her vision swimming, and weaponless, she would continue to beat that thing to death with her bare fists if she needed to!

She cursed as she was almost blinded when the sun broke over the horizon, rendering the already fading magical lights useless and bathing that monstrosity in the sunlight, even though those pitch-black scales seemed to absorb the light somehow.

All but one spot, right under its belly, there was something shining there.

Lakyus squinted her eyes recognizing something familiar and foreign stuck in the beast's body.

Her eyes widened at the realization. The ethereal shine of a familiar pommel and hilt gained her full focus.

But that could not be! Her blade flew away! There was no way it got stuck all the way inside the underbelly of-

Her train of thought stopped abruptly as the reason why she came here in the first place surged back in her mind.

The Corrupted Sword Crocdabal!

A weapon capable of inflicting never healing wounds... exactly like Master Brain's blade!

Negative energy!

The undead!

It all came together in her mind

This... all of this was because of that blade!

And considering the undead ability to empower themselves through negative energy... that must be the secret behind this monster's regeneration!

Her legs moved on their own accord, she began to run furiously toward the beast, ignoring every shout either directed at her or not.

If only she could reach it! She could make sure nobody else died!

“[Flow Acceleration]! [Ability Boost]!”

She felt her body reinforce itself as she sped up.

As if knowing what she had in mind, the skeletal fire head turned toward her, ready to incinerate her or block her path with its flames. But then the bloody and scorched form of Vulmitar slammed into it with the ferocity of a savage beast.

She continued to run even as she felt her muscle protest and even tear as she pushed her body beyond its limits.

Another head got in its path, lightning already crackling in its maw.

“DIEEEEEEEEEEE!”

The raging shout came from none other than a raging Rayne whose face was almost fully covered in blood as he pointed his hand at the said head.

“[PENETRATE MAGIC: LIGHTNING]! [PENETRATE MAGIC: LIGHTNING]!”

The two spells obliterated most of the lower jaw of the creature, but even as the boy collapsed on his knees he wasn't done yet as he threw every scroll on his person against the beast, obliterating most of its head in the process.

“DIEEEEE! DIEEEEE! DIEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!”

Lakyus continued to sprint, even as the unhinged boy continued to roar his rage at the beast. She never heard him sound like this, but this was not the time to think of what might have caused this complete collapse of any restraint or self-preservation instinct.

After all she had her own reasons to want this thing dead, completely annihilated, erased from the world.

As if pushing on last final stand, the last head interposed itself directly between her and the blade.

Damn it! She was so close! And there was no one else here! She might manage to go around it but-

She could not even finish her thoughts that two blurs slammed into the side of the third head pushing it to the side and opening a path for her.

Lakyus eyes widened at the sight of a heavily injured Leinas and Riyuro who just combined their strength to give her a chance. She had feared for them after seeing them fall alongside the monster and she tried till now to not think the worst. She felt a sliver of hope and relief pass through her heart filled with pain and rage. But all would be for nought if she didn't succeed here.

She finally reached the body of the underbelly of the creature, wrapping her hands around the Corrupted Sword's hilt and pulling as hard as she could.

It did not budge.

“[Greater Strength]!”

She cried out her Martial Art, enhancing her body even further.

She felt a shift, as if the blade just barely moved.

She pulled with everything she had, the muscles in her arms, back, and legs screaming as they were torn apart.

“AAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!”

She screamed her lungs out as she pulled and pulled.

And then... she flew back, sprawled on the ground.

She almost started crying at her apparent defeat, that was until she clearly felt the hilt of the blade still firmly secured in her grip.

She brought it to her eyes. The shorter blade still intact and emanating a dark miasma like nothing she ever saw before.

But that was not important right now!

She immediately tried to stand up. Only managing to get on all fours as her muscles could not possibly support her right now.

They were all at their limit... she had to pray that this was enough, or else...

She observed the three headed creature that had frozen over, remaining still, as if awaiting a signal from the world on how it should behave.

Her heart almost skipped a beat when it started moving again, a sign of their inevitable doom.

But, to a closer look, the heads were falling down, slamming limply on the ground with a sonorous crash.

The monster was dead.

The mount of the God of Annihilation was laid low.

The battle was won.

And now she could finally cry.

{The next day}

{Rayne's P.O.V.}

He limped through the emergency camp, almost slipping with every step. His body feverish due to mana exhaustion, still heavily injured, and only supported by a cane that served as a substitute for his right leg he mangled when he saved Arche.

He received many a dirty and disdainful look, but he didn't care. There was only one who had the right to judge him on this day.

Arche would throw a fit if she saw him right now, but he will gladly hear her nag his ears off if he returned alive, that is.

He felt the cold air almost stab his abused lungs every time he took in a breath.

What would master Satoru say if he saw him looking as pathetic as this?

He found the thought amusing. But before he could fantasize any further, he spotted who he was searching for.

He limped toward the tall man.

“Sir.”

He called out, the man gave him a glance before turning back toward his work without a word.

“Sir!”

He called slightly louder even though his hoarse throat cried in agony.

This time around the black haired man just gave him a disgusted glance which he accepted as long as he could say his peace.

“I... wanted to apologize... I was there when your daughter... when Ash died... I was protecting her... another of my friends was about to die... and Ash told me... s-she told me to save my friend.”

His voice broke as he recalled the moment in his mind, the worst seconds of his existence. How he used his ability to rescue Arche from the line of fire and when he turned back... all that remained of Ash was just a scorched mark on the ground.

He had lost any form of control then. Raging like the madman struck with grief that he was as he almost killed himself trying to destroy the monster who took her from him.

He gulped. He didn't want to remember, he just wanted to get this over with.

“I-I just wanted to tell you... and submit myself to your judgment... even if you kill me, I will understand and accept your judgment.”

The boy said as the man turned back toward his work, not speaking a word for a good five minutes as Rayne remained there.

“My daughter had always been a lonely child... I only recently understood that and regret not giving her a sibling... she told me of you, and how she wished to leave with you when you departed... I yelled at her for her stupidity... but love is deaf, a young one even more so... She did not feel lonely with you, she told me as much, and that was enough for me...”

Rayne felt like a dozen daggers just stabbed him through the heart, but remained silent even as the man turned back, his fist shaking and his eyes filled with pain and rage in equal measure.

“So why... why do you spit on her memory?!”

Rayne didn't know how to answer to that. But the man continued.

“You are not here to offer your mourning or apology! You are only here to be absolved of the guilt and the weight of your decision! That knife in your guts that continuously twist at the knowledge of what your action brought to... you want to be punished so that you can be cleansed of that guilt like a misbehaving child! Don't you?”

Rayne gulped at the man's words, even as the ugly truth of the matter was exposed. His ugliness laid bare for him to see and no longer denied behind excuses.

“N-No... I... I...”

He tried to come up with something, but there was nothing to come up with when faced with this.

“You will find none of that in me boy... you will carry that guilt for your whole life and no one will absolve you from it except for yourself.”

Rayne felt his legs give away, as he fell to his knees, ignoring the pain in his right leg. He started to cry, fat tears rolling down his face, he sobbed like the young boy he was. Uncaring of any dignity or composure, he poured his heart out, all his pain and regret.

“I-I can’t! I can’t f-forgive myself!”

He managed to stutter out amidst the sobs.

“Then don’t, learn to live with it... or throw yourself down a mountain if you can’t... you will have nothing else from me.”

The man said as he left Rayne alone with his thoughts.

{Lakyus’ P.O.V.}

She moved through the knee-deep snow. Of all her companions, she was her one who suffered the less injuries and so, even though her muscles hurt like hell, she could reach the location without too much trouble.

She felt like she needed to speak with him before leaving. And she didn’t want to wait any longer than she had to. She had no intention of looking like a coward shrinking away from her responsibilities.

It took her almost half an hour to follow his tracks till this point but that was just gave her time to think over her actions and words.

“Stormclaw.”

She saluted the man observing the white plains of snow and mountains in the distance.

“Adventurer.”

His tone was calm, Lakyus would have preferred if he shouted or cursed her, she would not blame him.

“I-“

“As the Stormclaw, I apologize for not offering my thanks for your assistance and defeat of S’hiraihyo, the Arashi Tribe will always have a tent for you and yours.”

Lakyus didn’t react to his words, truly, she wanted to bury herself here and now to never resurge.

The man turned around, those violet eyes, the same as his daughter seemed to cut through her soul.

“As a father I wish you never came here and would like to never see your faces ever again.”

Lakyus bowed her head at the harshness of the tone.

“I understand, I just beg of you to let us recover for a few days, just to be in traveling conditions... I swear we will leave and never return, if you wish I can already move away, but I beg of you to let my companions recover still.”

She offered without hesitation.

Silence ensued between the two of them, the sharp wind the only sound audible in this white plain.

“I will allow you that much, for you were dear to my daughter.”

Lakyus fought back the tears. Her eyes had grown quite irritated after all the crying she did the previous day.

“If there is anything I can do-“

“Haven’t you already done enough?”

The bite in those words made her stop in her tracks.

“I understand, Kaelin loved her brother though, she told me she would be happy to see him away from this dreadful place.”

The death glare she received would have been enough to make her cower, but this time she stood her ground. This was not about her after all, and she would not disrespect the young woman she had shared much with.

“Haven’t you taken enough from me already?”

Lakyus will accept all the harshness and hatred the man sent her way, but she will still say what Kaelin wanted, no matter the consequences.

“I don’t intend to take your son with me... Gods know I have no right to do so, nor do I believe I would be able to give him what she could... but I just wanted to make you aware of Kaelin’s wishes...”

The man lost most of his scorn and rage at her explanation.

“You really loved her that much that you would risk your own safety just to deliver her wishes?”

If the question was intended to be answered, Lakyus did not do so, letting silence be her response. The man did not press the subject as he released a heavy sigh.

“You know, this was her favorite place, she had always been a child who preferred the silence of nature over any person... So you can understand my surprise when she ended up falling for someone as energetic as you.”

That... she did not know... How many things did she not know about Kaelin yet? Why didn't she ask her favorite dish? Or favorite color? Or if she could play an instrument? Or... a million other things?

She felt tears prick her eyes at the realization she will never get to know any of that, nor will she ever see her face again, nor hear her voice.

A shadow passed over them, prompting Lakyus to snap her head upward.

She recognized the wyvern, Zephyra, Kaelin's bonded companion, now sporting a gash across her right side and missing her right eye.

And then it began, a sound similar to a whistle, but softer, more harmonic, a melody more beautiful and sad than any she ever heard before filled the sky.

“A wyvern's lament, it is a unique melody each wyvern produce if their companion pass before them... We also learn to master a few instruments to do the same if our wyverns pass before us, but even the best of us pale in comparison to a wyvern's natural talent, none is similar to any other, each of them is unique and is meant to be a final farewell to your life companion.”

Lakyus could not help it, her tears began to roll down her cheeks once more. She thought she had no more of them to shed, but apparently her body said otherwise.

And with a melody she will never forget echoing through the snowy valley of the Frostfang, her time here came to an end.

**A.N.**

**Man... I feel so sad, I can't even crack a joke.**

**Well, we only have a final chapter meant to be an epilogue for this mini arc.**

**These last two POVs were not initially planned to be here, hence why this chapter was delayed by a few days, but I think they fit better right here rather than next chapter.**

**Well, this chapter is also as long as the longest chapter in this fic, and it surely contains the longest battle I ever wrote against a single enemy. Plus this is the first major battle of the story where Satoru was not present... and the consequences speak for themselves.**

**We got a load of trauma coming back with all these first loves being cut off in their honeymoon phase. And the fact they are young teens unequipped to deal with such things doesn't help.**

**I am eager to hear your opinions in a comment / review, today more than ever before since I would like to know your opinion on the battle as I really struggled but was satisfied on how it came out.**

**Stay safe! Till next time!**