

## Legacy

Nayra looked on at the ceremony from behind her mother and father. Father Olem stood straight, but Nayra could feel the cold anger spreading through him. Her mother stood with her shoulders hunched, defeated. The whole family was here, all of them that had survived the war at least. There was less of them than once was, too few for a family that had once had dozens of branches. She didn't count though; she couldn't bring herself to do it.

Emrys stood next to Nayra on one side, while Anrosh held her hand on the other. There was no mourning period in the Empire, not really. Death had always been a big part of life in the Empire, they were raised with the knowledge that they might wake up one day with an army coming down on them. Death of loved ones was accepted, their sacrifice for the family and Empire acknowledged and then they all moved on. Yet, they were not in the Empire anymore.

Nayra tried not to think of all the things that she had lost, the time that she could've had with her father. Their relationship had become much better than what it had been when she was young, but still she felt robbed of that time. They were immortal, yet it always seemed like there was not enough time.

This wasn't supposed to happen, not here, not now. Her father had never been a fighter, he had devoted his life to growing life. That was all. His power had kept billions fed and healthy, it was not supposed to go this way. A man walked out of the line somewhere to the side, he walked over to Nayra's mother, took her hand and she hugged him close, whispered something in his ear that Nayra couldn't quite hear.

Nayra recognized him as her nephew, Allister, one of the younger sons of her older brother Nemek. She didn't know him well, though she had seen him often. He could almost always be found near Father Ender, his grandfather. He was one of the few who Father Ender had taken under his wing and taught more closely.

There were many in the family that had builds that were related or close to the build of the patriarch of their family. The bulk of the Ornn family in the Empire had served as farmers after all. But very few had ever been taken in by Father Ender and taught personally. She had heard him once say that not everyone had the green touch. She never really understood what that meant, but she knew that he thought that Allister had it.

Allister pulled back from the hug with his grandmother and then started walking over the grass, his bare feet carrying him gently to the center of the garden, a moment later Father Olem followed after him. It was a wild garden that surrounded them, with little regard for beauty and order. Plants were allowed to grow freely, to interfere with each other. It created a place that seemed wilder, that looked natural.

Nayra had asked her father once why he grew something like it, she had gotten used to the orderly gardens that he often cultivated. His response had been that it reminded him of the past, he didn't elaborate much on it.

Allister reached the center where a hole had already been dug up and reached down, placing the seed that Anrosh had returned to them in it. Nayra squeezed Anrosh's hand, and then pulled out of the grasp to walk over to her mother.

She didn't say anything as she stopped next to her, just provided her silent support.

Her mother spoke, in a hushed and whispered tone. “We always knew that we wouldn’t have him forever.”

Nayra turned her head to look at her mother, saw how her eyes looked forward at her husband and grandson kneeling on the ground.

She didn’t comment, instead she let her mother speak as she wanted.

“His immortality was never going to give us an afterlife,” her mother said. “He got it long before we knew much about such things, and... it was too interwoven with who he was. He never wanted to change it. He would say that he would not risk changing who he was, that what we got is what we got... I thought that I was ready for it, but... I just never thought that it would be so soon. That I wouldn’t be near him.”

Nayra bowed her head. She felt guilty for not being there too. It was them who were supposed to be in danger, at risk. Not her father who stayed behind.

“I’m sorry,” Nayra said.

Her mother took her hand in hers and squeezed. “It’s not your fault, it’s not anyones fault. We’ve always known that our world is a dangerous one. That there are no guarantees.”

Nayra closed her eyes. Knowing that didn’t mean that it didn’t hurt though. She opened her eyes and looked on as she felt powers being used, fire and life. The ground blazed in front of Father Olem and Allister, and then a tree started to grow. It was slow at first, but then it burst into the sky spreading wide with branches and full leaves until it towered over the entire garden, covering it with its light.

Nayra looked at it and nearly cried at the sight of it. The tree's bark was as black as night, its surface covered in patterns that seemed to move by themselves, as if... as if they were grass swaying in the wind.

The leaves though, they touched her the most, they were the same color as Nayra's hair. The same color as her father's hair. Blood red leaves rustled above them, and all Nayra could think about was that she shouldn't have to see this, that it was unfair.

Allister stood and stumbled, Father Olem caught him and held him up. Nayra felt her mother deflate. Of course, they had all known that there would be nothing. Allister could help the seed grow, but they had also known that it would take years, more likely decades even with Allister tending it until it would bear any fruit.

They didn't even know if worked. From Zach they had learned that her father's soul was damaged when he created the seed. They would have to be patient and see. What it was supposed to do was pass on some of his most powerful perks. They hoped that it would still work. Losing her father was a big blow to not just the family but the Sect as a whole. She turned and glanced behind the rows of family, where Ryun stood with Ereclaw, at a respectful distance.

Ryun had only just returned to the Sect, having made his way quickly from wherever it was that they had gone after the Dome. Ereclaw had made his way back a few days ago.

As the family started approaching the tree to give their final goodbyes, Karya turned and headed their way.

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“I should not have left,” Ereclaw said. Nayra didn’t comment, she didn’t think that it would’ve made a difference even if everyone was still there. Perhaps the only thing that would’ve changed would be that someone else would be dead.

“You couldn’t have known,” Ryun said.

“If we were all here,” Erclaw started. “Maybe we could’ve killed him.”

Ryun shook his head. “What happened, happened, there is no use lamenting on what was. We must look forward, always,” he said evenly, but Nayra saw how his fist was clenched. It was rare that she saw Ryun angry, but she knew that what followed was always... dangerous.

“We will find him,” Ryun turned to look at Nayra. “I promise you.”

Nayra glanced back to the three, the family had mostly moved away and were talking in smaller groups. Her mother though sat in front of the tree, one hand on the tree.

“I don’t know if my mother could handle losing more,” Nayra said slowly. “She keeps a brave face, but I can see it in her eyes. She lost too much.”

Ryun narrowed his eyes. “You assume that we would lose.”

Nayra raised a shoulder. “Zach told me more about the yeti, and the battle. We are strong Ryun, but... there are real monsters in this world.”

Ryun didn’t answer. It wasn’t that Nayra didn’t want to go after the yeti, that she didn’t want him dead. She had just... her father was a pillar. Someone whom she had always looked at as unbeatable. She had to admit

that his death had shaken her to the core. More than the war, more than the fighting in the core, it made her feel like nothing that she had done in her life was enough.

She needed to get stronger, to rise to the height where nothing could touch her or those that she cared about.

Ryun looked at her in silence, and then after a few minutes of studying her spoke. "I understand. We've grown... complacent."

"We need to grow stronger," Ereclaw added.

"Yes, we must," Ryun said.

Nayra took a deep breath and glanced at the blood-colored leaves of the tree rising above her. She could only agree.