

15

They sat in silence on opposite ends of the submersible, while it hummed through the infinite dark. Valle had given it a heading away from the Osah bubble and driven the motors to their maximum speed, before abandoning the controls. After several hours, they were far, far from the England/France dome, in the empty space that had once been the Atlantic Ocean.

Memories of Mr. Walter, of his home and of life there, battered Valle like the wind in Amarna's cooling disc. The jovial man, his black-streaked gray beard and the dark-colored vests he wore. Raising the twin bat pups he'd adopted. Cooking for them; teaching them about the world and the flood and the antideluvians and their history; reading to them and then listening to them read as they learned. Comforting them when they were hurt and challenging them when they were well.

Had he been with the OSA then? When he left Valle and Crucis at play or study or sleep, had he gone to discuss cullings and exterminations?

Suppose he had only joined after the pups were taken. Then he would have been within reach of them for years, without making an effort to contact or rescue them. He had risen to be the committee's chair: he wouldn't have been forbidden.

Valle turned Crucis's visor over in his hands. Much of its circuitry

THE TWO FANGS

had been blasted out by the impact, though the bullet hadn't pierced it entirely. There was blood caked around its metallic rim, a little splattered over the screen. Probably some of everyone's who had been there.

"Get rid of that," Grid muttered from her end of the submersible. "I don't want to see it."

The entire vessel was maybe fifteen feet long, heavily armored to withstand the water pressure, aside from the clear glass hemisphere that capped its front, where Valle's back rested. Opposite him, Grid was hunched in the narrowest point of the small cargo hold, eyes burning. She stood and approached him, gesturing to the visor.

"Get rid of it," she said. "unless you want me to think it's the only thing that separates you from the bat who looks exactly like you and just murdered my wife."

Valle met her eyes.

"Maybe it is," he said.

She drew her head back.

"Don't say that."

"Why not?"

"Because Crucis has to pay, and it sounds like you want to pay for him."

"Would you do that?" Valle stood. Though he couldn't stand at his full height in the submersible, he could still tower over the hawk. "I'm right here."

She was tempted. He could see it.

"You didn't kill her," she said.

"We're both the Fang of Osah. We always were. We were selected, we were trained. I didn't break the glass, but I got you in. I made her a target."

Grid's hands trembled. Valle leaned in closer.

"He and I have always been a team. It's always been a game. And I always knew it. I knew his rules."

"Shut up."

"The only difference is that you can't cut his throat. But mine's right here, and it's paper thin."

In a violent blur, her knife was at it. He could feel the edge parting

GROODS

the fur, shivering though her hand seemed perfectly steady. They locked eyes. Then she stole his voice box.

"I said *shut up*," she grunted, as he sat back down heavily, bewildered.

The hawk paced in the little space there was for it, knife in one hand and respiratory mod in the other.

"She's..." she muttered, barely audible over the roaring of the water outside. "She made it into the computer. You heard her. There's a part of her that's still there."

She looked to Valle, who would have been quiet even if he could have spoken. If whatever part of Amarna's consciousness still inhabited the surveillance computer, it wouldn't be rescuable, and Osah would root it out eventually. That knowledge was there in Grid's eyes, even if she didn't voice it. Her eyes pleaded and her beak trembled, but she just cast them down and folded her arms.

"I've made peace with it," she said. "five or six times. You saw the...the state she was in. They didn't do any of that to her. They changed out her cranium but she'd already had hers replaced. She was always sick. Every couple years we thought it was the end, but we managed to scrape something together and pay to get it fixed. It's not...this isn't new, her being gone."

Valle watched her in silence. Whatever she said, the pain was like claw marks dragged across her face.

"I'm gonna give you your neck back now," she said, tentatively. "You're not gonna try something like that again. I can't deal with that right now."

She handed it back gently. He made a show of wiping it off with the backs of his fingers before snapping it back in place.

"I said Crucis has to pay," Grid stood back.

"Someday Osah will phase him out. That's all you can hope for."

The bird lowered her brows at him. She turned away.

"There's no one Crucis has hurt more than you," she said, for her own sake more than for him to hear. She waved a hand back at him. "I still want that gone. I don't know if there's an airlock, or a harpoon gun, or something. Or just smash it, we'll pound it into dust."

THE TWO FANGS

“Not yet,” Valle tucked the visor into a pocket, pulled his loose shirt over it so Grid could at least not see it directly. “I want to show it to somebody.”