

Ally

As the month passed by, my days seemed as if they had been getting longer and longer. Being away from the constant action was starting to nag at the back of my mind. After months upon months at sea on our patrols, you almost became addicted to the adrenaline that came with the excitement and danger of the missions. I had received news a few days back that the single man in charge of our ships financially was convinced by my superiors to pay some extra coin to speed up the production on the new warship. Instead of a full year in production, they would have the ship completed in 6 months, which was almost unheard of. I had brought up my concerns to the Admiral about having the vessel rushed, but he assured me that everything would be functional and to standard by the christening date. While I could sense a hint of uncertainty in his own voice, I decided to trust in his instincts.

I could not help but slowly play with the food on the table before me. The thoughts of heading back to sea so soon were easily at the forefront of my mind. I found myself constantly making my way down to the shipyard on the south side of the city, checking on the status of the vessel and ensuring that everything was being built to code. This was more for my own sanity than anything else. Taking another bite of the ham in front of me, I shook my head to try and focus my thoughts on something else. The ship workers were getting annoyed by my constant visits so today I needed to take a break. Shifting my eyes around the dining room's many wall tapestries and cherry wood displays pinned to the light brown walls, my eyes fell upon the ceremonial sabre and pistol that had been given to me upon my commissioning. The jeweled guard of the sword glistened in the rising morning sun, sending small reflections of red, green and blue on the surfaces around the item.

Standing slowly, I made my way over to the display and began to inspect the sword's and pistol's more intricate details. Along the base of the blade, I could see my name expertly engraved into the sharp metal, along with the abbreviation of my rank. As for the pistol, it was a less detailed, standard officer flintlock service pistol with a wooden handle and frame. Not the most accurate gun but they did damage if they connected. The sound always did hurt my ears though...

Looking out the window, I could see that the sun had rose into the clouds and disappeared from sight. It looked like it was going to rain today which killed all of my intentions of going hiking. Letting out a slightly disappointed sigh, I turned and made my way slowly down the halls of my estate towards my training room. Since my ribs had pretty much healed, I had been training every day to get any strength back that I had lost over the month and a half that I had been recovering.

Walking into the empty room, I began to stretch out my stiff body and look around for what I wished to do that day. The grey stone walls were a nice contrast to the wood floor below with dark wood weapon racks set up along the edges of the room. Moving a straw training dummy

into the middle of the room, I grabbed a simple steel sword and readied myself. With a calm expression, I quickly ran through my simple routines of stabbing, blocking and cutting into my fake opponent until the dummy was no longer able to keep its shape and fell to the floor in a heap of straw. Cleaning up the mess that I had made, I then moved to unarmed combat. Imagining I had an opponent in front of me, I lifted my fists up near my muzzle and began going through the motions of jabbing at an opponent's face, ducking under punches and kicks, countering with my own swift kicks and finishing off the "opponent" with a roundhouse type kick that would land as a heel strike to the side of the skull. I ran through this routine for the next 2 hours to kill time until lunch.

Panting lightly, I stood up straight and placed my hands on my hips to catch my breath. However, I suddenly felt an arm attempt to wrap around my neck and in one swift motion, flipped the attacker over my back and let out a low growl while putting a knee into the male's chest to pin him down. Looking down at the male below me, my growl quickly faded and a smirk soon appeared on my face. Below me stunned was a grey and white wolf my age with a black line of fur running from between his ears to his neck and black ear tips. Looking down into his dazed blue eyes, I spoke in a joking tone.

"I never understood why you always try to get me Kodré. Don't you know by now I always end up on top?" I chuckled before standing and helping him up to his feet with a strong pull of his arm. While he dusted off his dress clothing, I walked over to a towel hanging on a ring in the wall and dried off the fur on my torso from any sweat that had gathered in it. Drying off my head last while I walked back over to my friend. I smiled and shook my head as I caught him looking my body over. Kodré was another one of the few close enough to me to know about my heritage and was the first to accept it fully. The wolf and I had gone through the military's officer training together and quickly became very close friends.

"Like what you see?" I asked with a sly smile, once again catching him off guard and causing him to stutter. Seeing his eyes move back up to mine with a hint of embarrassment in them, I laughed once more and gave the wolf a soft hug and backed off.

"I heard the news about what happened a couple months ago and came to check on you as soon as we docked." He replied, rubbing the back of his head with a chuckle, still embarrassed. "But I can see that you have clearly fully recovered from your injuries."

Moving over to place my causal short sleeve shirt back on my body, I motioned for the wolf to follow me out of the room and into the hallways. "For the most part I have healed, yes. The injured area is still a bit stiff, but I can deal with it." I replied while we made our way through another doorway. Kodré and I walked into the main sitting room, a large midnight purple carpeted room with a large white couch, loveseat, two chairs and a cushioned bay window where I frequented when I wished to relax by looking out into the rolling plains around the city. Looking at my friend however, I could tell by the way that he was shifting and his eyes avoiding my gaze when we sat down, I could tell that something had been on the wolf's mind and a look of concern fell into my eyes.

“Are you feeling well, Kodré? You seem a bit on edge.” I asked while I watched a servant bring in some tea and biscuits for us to indulge on until lunch had been prepared for us. Seeing his eyes shoot back to me, I watched carefully as he brought a ragged piece of paper out of his pocket and handed it to me.

“I found this stuck to my front door at my home with a dagger.” He said quietly. Looking at the piece of paper with a black hand pad print in the middle, It read:

*Eye for an eye.
A father’s debt will be paid in the bloodline.
The deed was never forgotten.*

Looking up to the wolf, whose eyes were now looking down into his lap, I let out a sigh and shook my head while handing the note back to him. “What the hell did your family get themselves into, Kodré?” I asked, clearly concerned for my friend and I wasn’t going to hide it. “What the hell would The Black Hand want with your family?”

“I don’t know.” I heard him almost whimper out as he rested his head into his palms, trying to hide the look of distress he currently had. Placing a couple fingers on my temples I closed my eyes and began to think. Due to the war, the young adult wolf was the only remaining member of his family’s bloodline.

“I want you to stay here with me, Kodré.” I said after a long while of silence between us. Lifting his head, I could see in the wolf’s eyes that there was an inner struggle going on, and this only made me more confident in my decision. “I will send a few servants to gather your belongings and instruct them if any strangers other than your servants ask what they are doing, they will reply with you are back with the fleet. At least it will throw someone off your trail for a while.

“Thank you, Daniel... you don’t understand how much this means to me.” I heard him choke out quietly with tear filled eyes. Without another word, I pulled the wolf’s emotionally broken down body into a tight hug and could feel the wet tears of his sorrow soaking into my shoulder with every sob.

Kodré and I stayed in that position for what seemed like an eternity until he had begun to gather his composure once more and we moved into a laying down position with his head on my chest. I completely understood why such a strong wolf had broken down so easily. The Black Hand was a well-known assassin’s guild that reined terror and death on families wherever they went. If you received a warning from them, it almost ensured that you would not be seeing many more sunrises. Looking out the window into the fields with a blank expression, my mind began to race with thoughts of the possible coming future.