

Chaos' Heir 221

Chapter 221 - Complaints

Azni limited herself to glance at Khan before suppressing every emotion and pressing forward. She knew that her friend could bring Asyat back to the camp far faster than her, but he was too valuable on the battlefield to abandon it.

Khan understood her thoughts and let her go without saying anything. Still, that sight ruined the pleasant emotion that seeing Liiza had generated and made him go back to a grim thoughtless state that carried a deeper resolve than before.

Thoughts tried to seep past his empty mental state as he dived back into the battlefield to resume his role. Khan had killed a lot by then, but he found himself surprised to realize how frail life was. Death often descended whenever his knife darted, but he had never fully acknowledged how his friends could very well be in the opposite situation.

What if the rebels had someone like Khan on the battlefield? His friends would die for the sole reason of standing on his path. That worry seemed strong enough to put an end to his special mental state, but everything stabilized and became firmer than ever once he reached a simple, instinctive conclusion. He couldn't control anything there, so it was pointless even to try.

That conclusion mostly came from his poor level, but Khan saw how even the stronger soldiers failed to save their lives or affect the battlefield meaningfully.. They had opponents who could reduce their influence, which applied to the leaders on both sides. Khan would have to be more powerful than Yeza to begin having more control, but that sounded vague since his current knowledge didn't allow him to comprehend the state he had to reach.

The acceptance of his small and even disposable role only improved everything that he had experienced before. Khan moved faster, had sharper reactions, and was deadlier than ever once he rejoined the mess. He lost himself, but he preserved a firm resolve at that time. He wanted to perform better to end that chaotic battlefield quickly.

More rebels fell by his hands as he resumed his search for troublesome targets. The battlefield seemed to enlarge as the number of troops shrunk. The rear team took care of the injured within their reach or transported to the camp those that managed to leave the mess.

The ruthless and relentless battles eventually culminated in a slow advance toward the castle. Yeza's side was forcing the enemy army to retreat and was exploiting that trend to kill as many opponents as possible. Khan and everyone else could go crazy now that the rebels were focusing on defending themselves or retreating.

The numerical advantage also benefited the battle among the leaders. Yeza and Captain Erbair saw adults Niqols or soldiers joining their fights and helping them against the rebels who had been able to face them until now. That bloody assault seemed about to end soon, but azure light suddenly flashed among the troops, giving the signal meant for a full retreat.

Yeza didn't stop the assault right away since the army was close to achieving a complete victory, but her expression changed when she checked her cube. The scouts on both mountains had alerted her of an imminent threat. The event wouldn't give her the time to end the battle or capture the castle.

"[Retreat]!" Yeza suddenly shouted among the disbelief of her allies.

"[What do you even mean]?" Captain Erbair immediately complained. "[We are so close to ending this in a single assault]!"

Yeza wished to have the time to explain everything to her allies. She realized how hard it could be for them to give up on everything they had achieved during the assault, but the situation didn't leave her other options.

Yeza knew that words would only make her army waste time without leading to actual conclusions. She stopped advancing and turned to run away from the castle without bothering to add anything else. She even controlled the mana around her to make it echo her feeling in the hope that her underlings would follow her without questions.

The Niqols, both young and adults, trusted Yeza deeply, and the wave of emotions that enveloped them helped remove the hesitation they felt in front of her order. They regretted leaving a battlefield that had taken the lives of many of their companions, but something disastrous seemed about to fall on them, so they decided to follow their leader.

The humans had a harder time accepting that decision, but they couldn't remain on the battlefield on their own, so they followed the Niqols as questions escaped their mouths. Some of the soldiers even dropped their polite tones when they requested proper explanations.

Khan could only snap out of his strange mental state and join his retreating allies. He didn't understand what was happening, but he didn't need to. His position only allowed him to follow orders.

The rebels felt confused, but they disregarded the meaning behind their opponents' retreat and decided to use that chance to attack. Azure symbols flashed on their forearms or chests as mental communications reached them, but they ignored them due to the frenzy that filled their minds.

The rebels had just gone from utter desperation to hope. The battlefield had transformed so quickly that they didn't have the chance to think about their actions. They fell prey to their intense desire to kill those invaders, which made them disregard any potential danger approaching the valley.

A strong group of aliens had survived among the rebel army. Those Niqols didn't hesitate to launch spells that ended on the backs of their retreating enemies as they continued to chase after them.

Yeza's army began to experience losses again, which only intensified the hesitation and confusion that had never stopped to fill her underlings. The humans grew even louder with their complaints, especially Captain Erbair since she had seen one of her Lieutenants falling prey to a strange scarlet bullet that exploded into a mass of fire once it reached the escaping troops. Yet, Yeza continued to run and make her emotions flow around her.

A series of hoarse screeches suddenly resounded throughout the valley and put an end to the complaints. Both armies glanced above them and noticed that a series of big figures had started descending inside the area. Yeza didn't need to explain her reasons anymore at that point. It was clear that she was trying to bring her group away from that flock of Tainted animals and monsters.

Khan only managed to memorize a few flashy features during the short time he spent inspecting the flock. He saw dark feathers, straight, long beaks, and glowing scarlet eyes. Moreover, the scene had

another terrifying detail. The specimen in the lead of the flying group was far bigger than the others and had two pairs of huge wings that shone with a silver glow.

Panic immediately filled the troops on the ground. Yeza's group did its best to run away from the valley, while the rebels immediately stopped their offensive to return to the castle. However, the flock dived at an unfathomable speed and reached the ground before anyone could get to their destinations.

Many monsters and Tainted animals descended on the rebels since they were directly under them. Instead, the leader and some relatively big creatures chased after Yeza's army.

The leader of those bird-like creatures abruptly stopped its descent when it was close enough to the ground. It spread its four wings as the silver glow that covered them intensified. The feathers on those limbs quickly stood up before shooting after the Niqols and humans desperately trying to leave the area.

Each feather was as long as a man's forearm and carried the leader's dangerous mana. A rain of sharp and heavy projectiles fell toward the ground and forced everyone to deploy defensive techniques or perform evasive maneuvers.

Khan sensed everything happening above him clearly, even if his eyes didn't point at the monster. The feathers carried so much mana that missing them was impossible, so he jumped left and right to avoid everything that tried to fall toward him.

The feathers dug the ground and made spiderwebs of cracks open when they released their power. Their effects were deadly, and they even succeeded in piercing some of the defensive measures that the troops had stopped to deploy.

Everyone expected that attack to end soon due to the limited resource used in the offensive, but the monster soon proved them wrong. The creature seemed to have an endless number of feathers since that deadly rain continued to fall even after its third wave. Those who had stopped to defend themselves ended up dying due to their miscalculation of the mutated beast's power.

Khan was relatively fine. The feathers were fast, but so was he. He was even slippery enough to perform precise dodges that often led him to avoid those projectiles by mere centimeters. Still, Khan couldn't feel happy about his situation since he had to witness the assault ripping the rear team to shreds.

The rear group had ended up in the lead of the retreat after Yeza's orders, but their members were very different in their nature. Some were Niqols capable of deploying spells that could influence the battlefield significantly, while others were relatively weak troops in charge of bringing the injured back to the camp.

The rain of feathers killed most of those weak troops on the spot and gave the others a hard time. A slaughter unfolded in Khan's eyes, but his skin soon started to burn as he mustered all the power contained in his body to accelerate and reach his girlfriend.

Liiza had deployed a layer of ice on her back to protect herself from the feathers that fell on her, but her spell couldn't stop the attacks completely. Her ability shattered after two projectiles stabbed it and left bleeding injuries near her spine.

Liiza didn't stop running away, but the feathers eventually began to fall toward her again. She could obviously sense them, but she wasn't fast enough to dodge all of them since they covered a relatively large area.

Two of the four feathers flying toward her were about to hit her back, but Khan suddenly jumped in their trajectory. He faced the projectiles with the [Blood Shield] covering the outer side of his right arm and the glowing knife in the other.

One of the feathers landed on his arm and slid across it. The projectile's favorable angulation allowed the [Blood Shield] to deviate its trajectory and made it slide across the array of clotted blood vessels. Entire chunks of his skin vanished as the sharp attack acted as a brush razor, but he eventually managed to send it away.

Meanwhile, another feather tried to hit his shoulder but met the glowing knife first. The weapon cut right through the projectile, but the latter was too long, and its texture was equally tough across its whole structure. Khan severed the enhanced quill in half and deviated its trajectory, but his blade suffered the same fate. It broke right after completing the attack.

Khan didn't have the time to think about his knife. He performed a messy landing on the ground before retrieving his balance and turning to inspect Liiza, but he found her on her knees, with a hand covering a bloody patch that had once been her left shoulder.

A feather had managed to hit her even after Khan had given his everything. Liiza had lost the entirety of her left arm in the process. The energy discharged by the feather after the landing had also disrupted her balance, making her fall to the ground.

Khan didn't hesitate to reach Liiza and throw her on his shoulders. She didn't oppose the process since she had long since noticed that Khan was behind her. Instead, she used that time to cover her injury with a layer of ice. She wasn't fine but losing a limb didn't make her panic.

Chapter 222 - Desperation

The rain of feathers didn't stop, but Khan could avoid everything that tried to fly toward him. Carrying Liiza inevitably slowed him down but only slightly. He remained fast enough to dodge the monster's threatening ability.

Liiza and Khan didn't say anything to each other, and she didn't try to jump down either. The crisis had already made her confirm that her weight barely affected his speed, and it was clear that she couldn't deal with the feathers on her own, especially after losing an arm.

Khan couldn't feel the pain radiated by his right arm. He didn't even think about his broken knife. Only the sensations caused by the falling feathers and the exit of the valley existed in his mind.

Painful cries filled the valley as Niqols and humans continued to die. The monsters' screeches resounded among the two mountains, but they couldn't suppress the familiar voices that reached Khan's ears. The Niqols he had learnt to know during the last months were dying, and he couldn't do anything about that.

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The higher-ups from both species soon reached the rear team and lowered the damages caused by the feathers. Yeza seemed able to make those projectiles change their trajectory, Captain Erbair could punch many of them away, and the other powerful troops also performed similar feats.

Soon, only those who could deal with the feathers or had found suitable protectors continued to run in the valley. Still, the deaths didn't stop since many monsters directly dived on the escaping group to kill with their sharp talons.

Khan did everything in his power to remain near Yeza, and she didn't make it hard for him. An aura capable of fending off the monsters surrounded the Niqols' leader, and she didn't hesitate to use her ability to protect her daughter.

The valley's exit eventually grew close enough to fill the survivors with hope, but the ground in front of them suddenly opened to reveal a series of mutated Lysixi. It turned out that the battle between the two armies had attracted more than one pack, and the scouts couldn't see the second coming.

A series of spells immediately shot toward the monsters coming out of the ground. Every ability user in the escaping group launched powerful attacks that killed the creatures before they could jump on the surface. Yet, more Lysixi soon replaced the dead and continued their charge.

A few Niqols managed to use the window created by the spells to jump past the holes created by the Lysixi, but those creatures soon sealed the path and bellowed in anger. The escaping group had to stop to avoid those threatening monsters, but that action only exposed them to the rain of feathers.

The two packs weren't working together. The bird-like monsters screeched at the mutated Lysixi and diverged part of their offensive on them. Khan almost hoped that the two groups would forget about them, but that didn't seem to be an option.

The mutated Lysixi created a proper wall with their bodies while Khan's group tried to understand what to do. They couldn't advance, but they couldn't stay there either since feathers continued to fall and some of the flying monsters had even landed near them.

Many eyes fell on the two leaders. Niqols and humans tried to find answers in Yeza and Captain Erbair, but it was clear that they were as lost as them. The two packs weren't leaving any path open even if they didn't plan to share their targets peacefully.

Utter desperation fell among the group. Plans formed and crumbled in Khan's mind as he tried to find a way out of that situation. He had a shot at leaving. He was fast enough to sprint past the Lysixi, but that only if they were distracted.

Khan eventually experienced nefarious thoughts when death seemed imminent. He hated what was appearing in his mind, but he couldn't ignore the products of his survival instincts.

Khan quickly came up with a list of who he was willing to sacrifice to save his life. The names of the soldiers or adult Niqols didn't affect him, but he felt dirty when he saw that many of his acquaintances had made it there. His only consolation was that his close friends weren't there.

"[Mom]?" Liiza asked in a weak voice when she realized how desperate the situation was.

Yeza stared at Liiza and the desperation that she felt melted. It had taken Liiza entire years and that terrible situation to rely on her mother, and the latter couldn't help but feel happy about it.

Yeza heaved a deep sigh before showing a warm smile. She knew what she had to do. In theory, her position as an ambassador made her the most valuable asset in the valley, but she didn't care about politics now. She had a chance to save her daughter, and no hesitation stood on that path.

"[Convince the old hag to come back home]," Yeza ordered in a warm voice, "[And don't make kids before you have established yourself in the tribe. Did you hear that, young man]?"

Khan found himself unable to speak when looking at Yeza. He could read her intentions on her face, and his throat closed because of that. He could only nod to answer her.

"[What does this mean]?" Liiza asked.

Liiza had lost a lot of blood, and pain filled her mind. She had used the entirety of her concentration to straighten her back enough to inspect the situation, so she was utterly exhausted now. Her mind couldn't process the meaning behind Yeza's words.

Yeza didn't answer. She closed her eyes before unleashing a wave of mana that crossed her underlings and expanded until it reached the monsters and Tainted animals in the area.

Khan had felt as if a dense gale had crossed his body. Nothing had happened to him, but he didn't fail to notice how all the flying monsters after his group fell to the ground. The same happened to the Lysixi. Yeza had made more than fifty monsters faint at the same time without affecting any of her underlings.

The incredible power revealed by Yeza left Khan stunned. He had no idea that the Niqols could deploy such a strong ability. It felt almost surreal that a single mage could accomplish something like that.

The humans and Niqols in the group shared Khan's amazement. Hope even appeared in their expressions, but their faces darkened when they saw that the monsters didn't remain asleep. Those creatures began to wake up mere seconds after falling to the ground.

"[Khan]!" Yeza shouted, and her words seemed to carry hidden meanings meant only for him.

Khan immediately snapped back to reality and sprinted toward the Lysixi. He ignored everything happening around him and jumped past the sleeping monsters to resume escaping from the valley.

Liiza struggled to raise her back. She was lying on Khan's right shoulder, and he was holding her legs with both arms, so she didn't have to worry about her balance. She could gaze at the rest of the escaping group, and her eyes widened after noticing that Yeza wasn't moving. The monster with two pairs of wings was even charging at her.

Khan wished to go deaf. Liiza called her mother in a tone that broke his heart. She even mentioned him a few times, but he forced himself to ignore everything and focus on escaping. He only made sure to tighten his grip on Liiza's legs to prevent her eventual attempts to run toward Yeza.

Yeza's smile widened when she saw how sad Liiza felt. She could finally confirm that her daughter cared about her, but her eyes eventually had to move on the four-winged monster. Her glare forced the creature to interrupt its charge and inspect its opponent in fear. That gave her the time to grab the only human that had remained in the area.

Captain Erbair felt dizzy. Her surroundings had turned into nothing more than vague images after Yeza unleashed her ability. Then, she felt someone pulling her from her shoulder.

Captain Erbair initially helped the pulling force since she believed that someone was dragging her away from the valley. However, when her vision stabilized, she found herself farther than before from the valley's entrance.

"What have you done?" Captain Erbair asked without bothering to use the Niqols' language.

"I couldn't keep them busy on my own," Yeza revealed while letting Captain Erbair go and showing a sorry smile.

Captain Erbair inspected her surroundings at that point. The Lysixi and the flying monsters had surrounded Yeza and her, but they didn't attack. Those creatures appeared scared of the two leaders even when they had an overwhelming numerical advantage.

"Is this your doing?" Captain Erbair asked.

"I can make them scared," Yeza sighed, "But monsters with such big packs don't give in to fear. They probably think that we are more valuable than all our underlings."

Captain Erbair inspected the distant valley's exit. A few monsters were running in that direction as they tried to catch the survivors with Khan in the lead. Those creatures weren't enough to scare away the underlings, but the latter's priority was to leave the area.

"You killed us," Captain Erbair coldly stated.

"It's our role to protect the younger generations," Yeza announced. "Your species will be fine. You have good soldiers."

"Humans don't think like that," Captain Erbair complained while moving her eyes on the monsters around her.

"I know," Yeza chuckled. "That's why I didn't give you any choice."

"Bastard!" Captain Erbair cursed while turning toward Yeza and grabbing her shoulders.

"Come on now," Yeza laughed. "We are already dead, but we can buy more time for our underlings. Let's focus on putting up a good fight, shall we?"

Captain Erbair wanted to crush Yeza on the spot, but she couldn't deny the nature of her situation. Monsters were all around her, and some of them had gone through the second round of mutations. Many had abilities, and both packs even had reinforcements near the castle or on the ground. Death was inevitable even for a soldier as strong as her.

"You are lucky that I like to fight," Captain Erbair sighed while letting Yeza go.

Yeza revealed a happy smile, but the two leaders soon had to turn toward the monsters. The latter had finally managed to overcome their fear and had launched a joint offensive.

Chapter 223 - Broken

Khan put as much energy he could muster into his escape. He ignored his surroundings, the struggling girl in his arms, and her screams to focus on leaving the valley.

The mountains eventually ended, but Khan kept running. The encampment was one hour from the valley, but he planned to reach it in less than thirty minutes by maintaining his top speed.

His sensitivity to mana tried to send information to his brain, but Khan didn't let anything disturb his concentration. He feared what Liiza's pleading would do to his mind if he let them inside, and the situation didn't allow mistakes. He couldn't waste Yeza's sacrifice.

Not many kept up with his speed. The adults behind Khan did their best to salvage what they could, so they slowed down their escape on purpose to help the injured and make sure that they weren't leading monsters to their encampment. Some higher-ups even stopped running after a while to deal with the few creatures still in pursuit.

The camp never appeared in Khan's vision until he crossed an invisible barrier that transformed the scenes in his vision.. Familiar triangular structures and an old Niqols wearing a worried expression replaced the barren shores.

"[She lost her arm]!" Khan shouted, and Zalpa quickly pointed at one of the habitations.

Khan didn't hesitate to enter the tent and drop Liiza on the ground carefully. Wet cheeks and teary eyes inevitably appeared in his vision and forced him to accept how much Liiza had suffered during the escape, but Zalpa quickly pushed him away to handle her arm.

Khan didn't mind those rude manners. He kept his eyes on Liiza as he crouched on the ground and waited for Zalpa to work her magic. Liiza was only partially awake, so she didn't fight the old Niqols as she ripped her robe apart and began to draw lines on the left side of her chest. Zalpa initially used only mana during the process, but she cut her palm and added blood to retrace the signs.

Liiza ended up with three glowing red symbols by the time Zalpa left her. The ice that covered the hideous injury had long since shattered, but the blood loss had also stopped. Khan even saw the skin on the maimed shoulder twitch every few seconds.

"[The pain will soon become unbearable]," Zalpa explained after turning toward Khan. "[I need to take care of the others, so I can't be with her all the time. You must make sure that she won't remove the technique]."

Khan nodded before approaching Liiza and sitting next to her as soon as Zalpa left that spot. He took her hand and held it tightly as that scene triggered other awful memories. He had been in the same situation on Istrone after the soldiers found Martha.

Zalpa opened her mouth, but she felt unable to say anything. She wanted a thorough description of the battle, but Khan was in no condition to give it.

"[I'll come back later to fix your arm and check on her]," Zalpa announced before heaving a deep sigh when she noticed that Khan didn't react to her words.

Khan couldn't feel the pain coming from his right arm. He didn't even bother to store his broken knife back in the sheath. The weapon remained on the ground to his right while he left worried kisses on Liiza's hand and hoped with everything he had that everything would go well.

"[It tickles, dummy]," Liiza said in a weak voice as some clarity returned in her eyes.

Khan immediately bent forward to caress her hair. Liiza revealed a warm smile as she lost herself in his warmth, but the glow of the red symbols suddenly intensified and transformed her face into an expression of pure pain.

Liiza screamed in pain and tried to turn, but Khan pulled her hand and used that chance to make her lay her head on his lap. Liiza didn't calm down and threatened to lay on her left, so Khan wrapped an arm around her neck and pushed her down from her right shoulder.

Liiza kicked and tried to break free, but Khan was too strong. She tried to summon her mana, but the pain was too intense. Desperation eventually filled her mind and made her rely on pleads.

"[Khan, make it stop]," Liiza pleaded in a broken voice.

A scream followed her words, and Liiza didn't forget to fix her desperate eyes on Khan when the wave of pain ended. He wanted to look away, but he couldn't leave her alone during the process, so he endured his desire to interrupt the procedure and shook his head.

Liiza soon screamed again, and her struggles didn't stop. Pleads came out of her mind whenever the pain allowed her to think, and some of them became curses as Khan kept refusing her.

The healing process tortured both of them. Liiza was so in so much pain that she started threatening Khan with topics that she knew would hurt him. She used their relationship, and her words felt like knives that pierced his chest whenever they reached his ears.

Khan never answered. He couldn't find the strength to speak there, and his only consolation came from the state of Liiza's injury. New flesh appeared during the most painful phases of the healing process. Bones, muscles, and skin slowly grew to recreate the missing limb.

The pain wasn't constant. The red symbols gave Liiza a break when her mind and body were about to reach a breaking point. She could finally calm down in those moments, but the memories of her threats didn't allow her to rest.

"[I'm sorry]," Liiza said during one of the breaks as tears fell from her eyes. "[I don't want to say those things, but it hurts so much]."

Khan felt able to speak again when he gazed at her regretful expression. He revealed a proud smile before whispering words in the most loving tone that he could muster. "[Don't worry about me. You are doing great]."

"[Khan]," Liiza called as fear seeped in her voice, "[It's coming back. I can feel it. Quick, make someone else take your place. I don't want to say those things to you]."

"[I'm not going anywhere]," Khan stated before bending forward to leave a long kiss on Liiza's forehead.

Liiza smiled, but the pain quickly returned and restarted the cycle of screams, curses, and threats. Khan didn't budge, and his eyes often fell on the growing arm as he tried to calculate how long that process had to last. The results of his study were disheartening, to say the least.

Zalpa entered the tent to check on the couple a few times, but she found herself unable to do anything. Liiza only had to wait for the technique to end, and Khan refused to let her hand go to get

his arm treated. Also, he hoped that the pain spreading from his injuries would replace what he experienced during Liiza's screams, but his mind betrayed him.

The healing process lasted almost half a day. The pain ended and the red symbols went dark when Liiza's arm completely regrew. The limb was slightly darker than the rest of her body, but it slowly returned to its natural color.

Liiza finally managed to sleep after everything ended, but Khan didn't let her go. He remained awake and listened to her breathing to confirm that everything was alright. He even caressed her whenever bad dreams tried to ruin her rest.

'What will happen to us now?' Khan wondered while Liiza rested.

His relationship wasn't at stake, but too much had happened during the crisis. The Niqols had lost their main ambassador, and the monsters had decimated his group. Khan wasn't even sure of how many had survived since he had yet to leave the tent.

His worries and thoughts vanished when Liiza woke up and smiled at him. The two exchanged a long kiss that tried to make up for everything they had to endure during the healing process. Liiza even checked her new limb, but it still felt too sore to work properly.

"[Don't get up]," Khan ordered, but Liiza didn't listen to him.

"[I want to see who survived]," Liiza said while dressing and straightening her back, but she suddenly lost her balance.

Khan moved to make her fall on his chest. Liiza sniffed as she held his robe tightly. She felt weak and useless, but Khan decided to fulfill her wish. He wrapped an arm around her back and helped her stand up.

Liiza and Khan walked out of the tent slowly, and he never let her leave his arms. The camp appeared empty when it unfolded in their vision, but they found Zalpa sitting next to a tent as they started inspecting it.

"[What do you think you are doing]?" Zalpa scolded when she saw the couple.

"[How is the situation]?" Khan asked.

Zalpa wanted to force Liiza to rest, but she found it impossible to ignore her begging expression. The old Niqols heaved a helpless sigh before standing up and doing her best to summarize the situation. "[Very few have survived]."

"[Can we see them]?" Khan continued.

"[None of them are alone]," Zalpa explained. "[You would only disturb them now. Let everyone rest for the rest of the day. We'll understand what to do tomorrow]."

"[Zaza]," Liiza pleaded.

"[I can't right now, Lii]," Zalpa didn't give in. "[It's not only about the physical injuries. The battle might have broken some of them]."

Liiza could only give up on her request in front of Zalpa's firm refusal. She pulled Khan's robe, and he understood the hidden meaning behind her action. He nodded at Zalpa before walking Liiza back to their tent.

Khan sat on the ground, and Liiza took her place on his lap. The girl forced herself to use her left arm, but it was still too unresponsive. Yet, she used her other limb to place it inside Khan's robe and perform an odd hug.

"[How are you]?" Khan felt the need to ask when tears fell from Liiza's eyes. He didn't want to leave her alone with her thoughts.

"[I'm broken]," Liiza whispered as she adjusted her position to hide her face in Khan's neck. "[My planet is experiencing a global crisis, deaths have become a normal occurrence in my eyes, and the person I trust the most is a human met a bit more than six months ago. I'm deeply and thoroughly broken]."

Khan remained silent as he tightened his embrace. Liiza started to kiss his neck to deal with her sorrow according to the Niqols' way, but sobs soon interrupted her. Her grief was too intense to deal with it by losing herself in her boyfriend's warmth.

"[It's fine]," Khan whispered to her ear. "[I'm here]."

Liiza exploded into tears. She sobbed loudly and wrapped her legs around Khan's waist in a desperate attempt to get even closer to him. A sad cry eventually escaped her mouth as Khan did his best to support her. "[It would have been easier if I still hated her]."

Chapter 224 - Familiar

Liiza faced her grief in a way that Khan could only describe as human. Her tears didn't stop flowing even after she fell asleep in his arms. Processing her feelings without relying on parties or intense sensations had exhausted her.

Khan didn't sleep. He lay Liiza down and let her use his lap as a pillow before facing everything he had experienced during the battle. A lot had happened in mere weeks, and he had never had the chance to process those events on his own.

Nitis had transformed Khan. The Niqols had given him so much, and part of that wasn't necessarily good. He had learnt the depths of his personality, which were incredible when they involved its bright shades. His love was powerful, intense, and profound. His affection toward his friends was pure and honest. His determination and resolve were immense.

However, the dark shades of his personality shared those intense and powerful features. His desperation was boundless, his coldness could make him see his acquaintances as sacrificial pawns, and his detachment was scary. Khan's kill count had skyrocketed, and he didn't even keep track of it anymore. He didn't like taking lives, but he wouldn't hesitate to wave his knife if the situation required it, and the event wouldn't affect him too much either.

Khan had learnt to feel with more intensity than aliens who basically worshipped emotions. The cracks in his personality had only widened because of that. His emotional spectrum had expanded on both good and bad sides, and he couldn't take any of that back. His mind forced him to experience everything, which wasn't ideal when his intense love for Liiza and his cold approach to battles coexisted.

The lack of regret for regret was the feature that scared Khan the most. He wasn't a murderer who justified his actions through delusional thoughts. He could inspect everything with impersonal eyes and understand when something was generally wrong. Yet, he had his reasons for everything that appeared bad or evil.

The killing of the mutated Niqols was an act of mercy. Khan had spared that species from a massive amount of pain. His betrayal of the Global Army was nothing important. Even Captain Erbar saw it as a regular occurrence when it came to ambassadors. The blood on his hands always had a reason. He wasn't a mindless killer. He was a soldier with orders who happened to be good at taking lives.

The world could be evil and cruel. Khan's nightmares were a constant reminder of how life could punish ordinary people for no reason at all. That alone made him accept that he wasn't turning into a monster. He was only joining the unavoidable system that ruled over the whole universe. Violence was a common theme that no species seemed able to escape.

Still, the nature of the world was only part of the reason behind his current acceptance. It would have taken Khan far longer to be at peace with his present self if it weren't for the girl sleeping on his lap. Liiza had taught him so much about feelings that he didn't even recall how he faced them before. Also, she had given him love so intense that all the ugly scenes seen during his life felt worth it since she could rest on him.

Khan knew that it was easier to be like that on Nitis. The humans on Earth would probably struggle to accept his new intensity, but it was too late now. He already felt like an alien among his species, so he didn't care about the possible problems that his changes could cause.

There was something else among that mess of emotions. Khan didn't forget about the mindless and almost instinctive mental state he had reached during the battle. Everything had felt simpler among the chaotic discharges of mana. He had flowed and fought like never before, and part of him desired to experience that again.

The long day ended as Khan remained immersed in his thought and made sure to cuddle Liiza whenever she went through bad dreams. Soon, only the worries about his friends stayed in his mind. He had yet to understand how many had died on the battlefield, and he hoped with everything he had that none of his close friends had fallen.

His worries didn't make him interrupt Liiza's sleep, but loud voices eventually reached his tent and woke her up. The couple exchanged a long and sweet kiss before standing up and leaving the habitation to check what was happening in the camp.

"I saw her in a daze!" Lieutenant Kintea's voice resounded throughout the camp and led the couple to a small gathering in a relatively empty spot among the tents.

Khan and Liiza could soon inspect the situation. Lieutenant Kintea and two soldiers stood in front of Zalpa, who limited herself to examine them with her cold eyes. A few familiar figures sat around them, and their faces appeared quite serious. They almost failed to notice the arrival of the couple due to their interest in the conversation.

Other Niqols and humans came out of the tents and reached that small gathering. Khan and Liiza could finally gain an idea of who had survived the battle in the valley, and the situation was grim for both species.

The human side had Lieutenant Kintea, the two soldiers, George, Paul, and Kelly. They all appeared in a decent state, but that felt almost normal after spending an entire day resting under Zalpa's care.

The Niqols' side had a few adult aliens, Ilman, Azni, Asyat, Doku, Havaa, and other students with whom Khan had never bonded too tightly. They were also relatively fine. Even Asyat's leg had grown back, but the girl didn't appear too excited about it, and Khan could understand why after witnessing the painful healing process.

"[Where is everyone else?]" Khan asked as he tried to inspect the insides of the tents nearby through his sensitivity to mana.

"[This is everyone]," Doku revealed before moving his gaze on the ground.

Khan's eyes widened in surprise. The group didn't even reach twenty-five members. It also lacked many faces that he had grown used to having around. Helen, Veronica, Brandon, Zeliha, and many who had traveled with him during the last period didn't make it out of the valley.

The army initially counted one hundred troops, but the battle and the sudden arrival of the two packs had killed more than three-quarters of them. The situation was so poor that Khan struggled to feel glad about the survival of his closest friends.

The event had been rather lucky. Ilman, Doku, and George had relied on their experience and abilities to survive the battle and help those around them. Azni had accompanied Asyat back to the camp, so she could avoid facing the two packs. Also, the monsters had focused on the stronger troops during the sudden attack, so those students had managed to avoid ending up in a deadly situation.

That lucky turn of events didn't change the nature of the situation. Too few had survived, and the battlefield had even broken the spirits of many of them. The army was no more. Their group was no more than a team full of people who didn't want to fight anymore.

"Khan, this isn't the time for that," Lieutenant Kintea scolded before pointing at Zalpa. "I saw Captain Erbair falling into a daze after Ambassador Yeza's ability. She must have done it on purpose to weaken our side!"

"Yeza just saved our lives," Khan commented. "Are you sure you want to bring this up now?"

"I can't remain alongside aliens ready to sacrifice our leader for petty political strategies," Lieutenant Kintea snorted. "How do you expect us to follow orders now?"

"Do you think I care about how you feel?" Zalpa asked in her bad accent.

"Your leader killed Captain Erbair on purpose!" The woman next to Lieutenant Kintea shouted. "This betrays everything we have built in the past years!"

"Politics," Zalpa snorted. "You don't know if you'll survive the light, but you worry about politics."

The survivors had been too focused on their escape to inspect their surroundings. Only Lieutenant Kintea had seen that Captain Erbair had become unresponsive after Yeza unleashed her ability. He knew that his words had little value since he lacked proof. Yet, he wanted to gain something out of what he had witnessed, but Zalpa was a wall that his threats couldn't pierce.

"This is useless," Khan sighed while bringing Liiza closer to his chest. "[Zalpa, what do we do now]?"

"I'm still your superior!" Lieutenant Kintea complained, but Khan ignored him as he approached his friends and sat among them.

"[We can't do much]," Zalpa revealed. "[Returning to the castle might be our best option]."

"[Won't that make all of this pointless]?" Azni asked while sitting closer to Liiza to envelop her in a hug.

"[It's better than trying to seize an area filled with monsters with nothing but kids and idiots]," Zalpa declared, but she soon voiced a weak "[sorry]" when she understood that she had gone too far.

"You even plan to retreat now," Lieutenant Kintea exclaimed in disbelief. "You didn't join the battle, so why would you be in charge now?"

"You should consider shutting your mouth," Zalpa threatened.

"Why is that?" Lieutenant Kintea asked. "Will you kill me too?"

"You have insulted Yeza in front of her daughter," Zalpa explained.

Lieutenant Kintea wanted to say something, but he couldn't find good words when everyone glared at him. Even the humans around him didn't seem to agree with his approach. Only the female soldier next to him appeared willing to support his argument, but that felt pointless right now.

Khan honestly didn't care whether Lieutenant Kintea was telling the truth. He only wanted the shouts to end. The situation was too grim, and that behavior worsened it.

"[What happens after we return to the castle]?" Khan questioned.

"[We wait to receive further orders]," Zalpa replied.

"That's it?" Lieutenant Kintea scoffed. "Your plan is to wait for everything to end?"

Zalpa was about to lose her cool, but a peculiar sight suddenly filled her vision. The event was impossible to miss and soon made everyone gaze at the sky.

A wave of darkness moved through the sky and left behind dark shades that the Niqols knew far too well. The sunlight seemed to retreat in front of the shadows that took control of the world. It didn't take much before Nitis' iconic night swept away the day.

The darkness finally returned. Tears fell from the Niqols' eyes as they stared at the familiar black sky. Only Liiza remained almost expressionless since she had cried too much the previous day. Also, an idea was taking form in her mind as Nitis regained its natural colors.

Khan couldn't help but smile at that nostalgic sight, but pure happiness soon diverted his attention elsewhere. Foreign emotions spread inside his mind when the sunlight disappeared. He sensed Snow calling for him, and he didn't hesitate to summon it in the area.

The other Niqols experienced the same happiness when they reestablished the connection with their Aduns. Those creatures were a big part of the aliens' lives, so regaining access to their minds brought some consolation to their poor mental state.

Only Liiza couldn't experience that feeling, but her idea allowed her to avoid thinking about Zama. She even voiced her plan while her companions remained astonished. "[We should fly to the elders]."

The sudden announcement made everyone divert their attention from the sky. Both Niqols and humans turned toward Liiza in a desperate attempt to add more details to her proposal.

"[That makes sense]," Zalpa announced, "[But I can't leave you alone in the wild. You might face a flock of monsters, and moving as a group will only make you flashier]."

"[I can go]," Liiza explained. "[That's my tribe's role in the end]."

"[How do you plan on reaching them without Zama]?" Zalpa asked, but she regretted voicing that question when Liiza laid her head on Khan's shoulder.

Chapter 225 - Changes

The meeting had been an emotional rollercoaster for Khan. He had gone from utter sadness about the number of casualties suffered in the valley, cold anger toward Lieutenant Kintea for his insults, and pure bliss at the sight of the night. Yet, Liiza managed to add confusion to those feelings.

The meeting didn't give Khan the time to accept how many of his companions had died. He didn't need to control the discussion either since Lieutenant Kintea had no power over Zalpa. He had called Snow as soon as the night descended, so he could immediately understand what Liiza's gesture meant.

The elders were a topic that the Niqols mostly kept for themselves. They were one of the classified information that the humans weren't allowed to learn, and Khan had never probed too much. His species couldn't go past the tribes since Yeza handled that relationship, so his knowledge had always remained relatively vague.

The Niqols divided their society into tribes, but their oldest members could become elders whose power came into play when it came to worldwide matters. Khan felt sure that they had something to do with the current division of the various armies on Nitis, so it made sense for those political figures to decide what role his group had to play.

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However, Liiza had hinted that Khan would accompany her, and Zalpa's reaction explained how deeply she hated that idea. Liiza was right when she claimed that her tribe made her perfect for that role, but bringing a human along was forbidden, even after a global crisis.

"[I won't show him anything]," Liiza explained while snuggling closer to Khan. "[I just want him to be with me during the travel]."

Khan wrapped an arm around Liiza's shoulders, and she didn't hesitate to get closer to make their foreheads touch. They could feel their desire to face their losses in the Niqols' way, but Lieutenant Kintea didn't let that conversation proceed smoothly.

"Why should Khan go to the elders?" Lieutenant Kintea questioned. "He has no political relevance. I should be the one to attend the meeting."

"There won't be any meeting," Zalpa scoffed. "This isn't a political occurrence. Khan will accompany Liiza in a classified location and wait for her to be done."

"Why can't one of us go with her anyway?" Lieutenant Kintea continued. "All of us have Aduns, and it would be safer to travel with an adult."

"I don't trust any of you," Zalpa shortly explained before turning to approach a cauldron nearby.

Lieutenant Kintea wanted to speak again, but the woman next to him placed a hand on his arm to interrupt him. The soldier shook her head, and the Lieutenant finally gave up on the matter. The latter only shot a meaningful glance at Khan and nodded a few times before returning to his tent.

The woman and the other soldier also left the area. Soon, only the Niqols, Khan, George, Paul, and Kelly remained in that part of the camp. Many of them kept their gazes on the ground, while others couldn't stop inspecting their companions and thinking about many missing faces.

Life was frail. Khan didn't know how else to describe that scene. Veronica's kindness, Helen's growth, Zaliha's pride, and all the features that he had to learn about those who didn't make it out of the valley had disappeared in a short day. So much only lived inside his memories now.

Khan wouldn't forget his past months. Lieutenant Dyester would be disappointed if he hid away all his painful memories. Khan wasn't even sure his new emotional spectrum could allow him to disregard everything experienced on Nitis. After all, he could value his happiness so much because he knew sorrow and pain.

The silence that had fallen among the group only reminded them of those lost during the battle, but no one was in the mood to speak. Sad smiles and hugs happened whenever eyes met. Kelly didn't hold back from nodding at Khan either. Her past complaints about his behavior felt pointless after everything they had experienced during the crisis.

"[I believe everyone wants to drink]," Zalpa announced, breaking the silence and attracting everyone's attention.

Zalpa turned to carry four cups filled with strong booze to the group. She then returned to the cauldron, repeating the process until everyone in the empty spot had a drink. She obviously prioritized the Niqols, but Khan felt happy enough to be the first among the humans to get his part.

"[Today might be hard]," Zalpa exclaimed after sitting among the group, "[Tomorrow might be even worse, but the future will be bright with you as the new older generation. Your stronger foundation will bring the Niqols to new heights]."

"[Zaza, this isn't the right time]," Liiza complained, but a sniff suddenly resounded among the group and made everyone turn toward the source of that noise.

Tears fell from Ilman's eyes as he nodded repeatedly. He gulped his cup before raising it to the sky and shouting. "[For Nitis]!"

Azni shook her head as a helpless sigh escaped her mouth. Doku patted her head before gulping his cup and raising it to the sky. He didn't shout, but he still spoke loud enough to make everyone in the group hear his voice. "[For those who aren't here]."

"[Both humans and Niqols]," George added before emptying his cup and rising it to the sky.

Some also drank their whole cups before raising them to the sky. Khan and Liiza avoided emptying them, but they still joined that toast. The event lasted only a few seconds, and everyone soon went back to normal celebrations.

The couples didn't leave the party quickly. They had learnt how quickly the crisis could kill them, so they wanted to remain among their friends as long as possible. They would have time to share intimate moments with their loved ones, but not that day.

Everyone pretended to have forgotten about Liiza's idea, and Khan played along. He didn't ask anything and focused on dealing with the feelings caused by the aftermath of the battle. He knew that Liiza would explain everything once they remained alone anyway.

The group tried their best to be loud, but everything felt too silent, even if Ilman shouted whenever someone talked to him. Khan and the others had grown used to entire crowds of Niqols celebrating around them, and that small gathering couldn't match them.

Awkward and sad silences still fell among the group, but Zalpa always said something to put an end to those moments. She even tried her best to be less grumpy than usual, and Liiza shot warm smiles toward her whenever she caught her suppressing mean comments.

The atmosphere lightened before growing heavier again in a cycle that repeated itself for many hours. The booze seemed endless when Zalpa took care of refilling the cups, and the group's thirst wasn't too different. Everyone drank a lot. Even Khan ended up feeling dizzy by the end of the event.

Most of the Niqols and humans there had been awake for mere hours, but no one complained when their friends got too drunk to remain outside of their tents. The group soon dispersed, and Khan and Liiza also left.

"[What do you have to do with the elders]?" Khan asked before helping Liiza lie on the ground and throwing himself next to her.

"[Just see them as very old Niqols]," Liiza explained as she removed her dirty clothes and threw them toward the corner of the tent.

"[I hope they don't make us fight again]," Khan whispered while Liiza opened his robe and lay on his bare chest.

The two had yet to wear clean clothes. Zalpa had been alone in the camp, so she didn't prepare clean robes for the group. Still, the survivors barely cared about their smell or appearance. The party actually worsened those two features.

"[Are they strong]?" Khan asked as he moved his hands on Liiza's bare back and enjoyed how the booze in his system enhanced the sensations caused by her cold body.

"[The Niqols get stronger with time]," Liiza groaned. "[Of course they are strong]."

"[Why didn't they fight with us]?" Khan continued.

"[You know how important it is for us to prepare the new generations]," Liiza reminded. "[They would have intervened only if we truly risked losing Nitis]."

"[I hate them already]," Khan admitted.

"[Me too]," Liiza revealed. "[I guess we can be as dumb as the humans]."

"[You are lucky you are cute]," Khan teased, and Liiza immediately voiced a sweet chuckle.

The two soon kissed before sticking to the Niqols' traditions. They were still physically and mentally sore, but they didn't dare to waste their time together. They didn't know when their death would arrive, but they were in each other's arms right now. The world felt perfect when they abandoned themselves to their passion.

An entire day had to pass before loud screeches resounded in the sky and alerted the camp about the arrival of the Aduns. Khan only half-donned his dirty robe before hurrying outside his tent to welcome his eagle. Liiza began to follow him, but she eventually decided to remain at the habitation's doorsteps.

A series of flying figures pierced the barrier before diving toward the tents. Khan soon saw a white feathered creature landing on him and voicing even louder screeches. Similar scenes happened in the camp as humans and Niqols rejoined their Aduns and did their best to show them their affection. Even Lieutenant Kintea couldn't help but feel happy about that reunion.

Snow pecked Khan's head with its beak softly. The two could feel each other's happiness through the mental connection, and that emotion only grew stronger as they went back to their old habits. Khan ruffled Snow's feathers while the latter directly sat on him to play with his hair.

Zalpa eventually put an end to that playful reunion. Liiza approached Khan and Snow when she saw that the old Niqols was walking toward them. He didn't miss her arrival, and Snow let him go when it sensed his feelings.

"[I have already prepared potions that will hide your presence]," Zalpa announced as Khan stood up. "[Nothing has tried to get to the Aduns, so the area should be safe for now. I think you should depart right away]."

Khan and Liiza nodded, but Zalpa shook her head when she saw that they were still wearing the robes from the battle. She ordered them to remain there before picking up potions, a backpack with provisions, and new clothes from one of the larger tents and bringing them to the couple.

Khan and Liiza changed inside their tent, and Snow tried to follow them. The Aduns was too big for that small entrance, but that didn't stop it from sneaking its head inside it. The Aduns wasn't ready to separate from Khan so soon. It wouldn't let him leave its gaze until they had a long flight together.

"[Remember our orders]," Zalpa reminded after the couple exited the tent.

"[He won't even get near the elders]," Liiza promised.

The blush on Liiza's face made Zalpa glare at Khan, who pretended not to understand the nature of that gesture. He limited himself to make Snow lower its head so that the old Niqols could apply the potion on its feathers.

Zalpa moved to the couple after dealing with the Aduns. She applied the same type of potions used during the army's journey to that location. Her methods would make Liiza and Khan almost invisible to eventual monsters, but she still worried about them.

"[Come back here after you are done]," Zalpa ordered. "[We will remain here in case the elders decide to send us hunting]."

Khan and Liiza didn't like that possibility, but they still jumped on Snow to begin their travel. Khan could confirm that Liiza's left arm had almost regained its former strength when she grabbed his waist to cling onto him. He remained worried about her endurance, but the Aduns sensed those feelings and decided not to go too crazy.

Azni and the others gathered around Snow to wave their hands at their companions, and the Aduns soon set off. Khan could finally experience the beauty of flying again, but Liiza quickly tightened her embrace since the event was forcing her to recall Zama.

"[Our first flight together was like this]," Khan shouted to make sure that his words could pierce the strong winds caused by Snow's speed.

Liiza hid her face in his hair, but he sensed that a faint smile appeared on her face since her mouth was on his neck. It felt almost unreal how much things had changed in a bit more than six months.

Liiza could still recall when she took Khan to the mountain chain for the first time. They had been nothing more than strangers attracted to each other due to their mana back then, but she had allowed him to cling to her waist nonetheless.

The situation had turned upside-down afterward. Khan and Liiza had developed an intense and passionate love that had led them to that familiar but opposite position. Liiza clung to Khan and held him tightly, separating from him only to adjust Snow's direction. She didn't need to check any map to know where the elders lived.

Chapter 226 - Meeting

The couple didn't say much during the flight. Khan and Liiza were out of words and tears, and exhaustion filled their minds. They could experience how tired they truly were after getting away from their group and roaming among the dark sky.

The months under the sunlight had featured constant tension that Khan and Liiza didn't fully acknowledge until they left. The winds and familiar darkness that enveloped them while they flew through the sky forced them to feel how deeply Nitis and they had changed.

Nitis had regained its natural shades, but everything was different. The changes didn't only affect its fauna and overall environment. Khan and Liiza felt unable to appreciate those wonderful sceneries after everything they had gone through. They couldn't experience the same naive happiness from the months before the crisis.

Khan and Liiza hugged each other, exchanged casual kisses, and filled their partner with caresses, but they didn't speak. Those gestures were enough to express how they felt. The sunlight had brought them even closer, but it had also shattered their previous view about the world.. Their respective love was their only consolation.

Liiza grew tired of clinging to Khan's waist after the couple spent an entire day flying above lands that he had never seen. Khan didn't hesitate to place her on his lap so that she could wrap her legs around his torso. The new position almost made them fall prey to their passion, but Snow made sure to express its annoyance when it felt that they were going too far.

It felt nice to experience that complete intimacy. That was different from the time spent in the castle. It reminded Khan and Liiza of the cave in the marsh when they had a home for themselves. The world around them had disappeared and had left them with nothing more than Snow's back, but they didn't desire anything else. Their happiness reached its peak only when they were truly alone.

It turned out that an entire day of travel wasn't enough to reach the elders. The couple had to take a few breaks to let Snow rest and handle natural needs. Of course, Khan and Liiza inspected every area multiple times before deciding to stop there and create a cozy home. They never remained too long on the surface, but they always made sure to enjoy that time together.

Snow landed in a simple-looking plain after almost three entire days of flight. The area appeared empty, except for the short vegetation that covered the surface, but Khan felt that something was off. He didn't sense anything specific, but he couldn't be at ease either. The region carried a strange pressure that didn't allow him to relax.

"[The elders are just ahead]," Liiza stated while taking Khan's hand and moving toward the center of the plain.

"[I thought I couldn't see them]," Khan replied without halting his steps.

"[No human should ever see these areas]," Liiza explained.

"[Are you creating troubles for me]?" Khan asked.

"[Maybe]," Liiza revealed before taking his arm in her embrace, "[But I want you to see Nitis' true face. I'm tired of these traditions]."

Liiza fixed her timid eyes on Khan, and he didn't hesitate to free himself to wrap an arm around the back of her waist. Liiza tried to appear resolute, but it was clear that the meeting worried her a little, and Khan wouldn't let her face it on her own.

The two walked until they crossed an invisible barrier that transformed the scenes in their vision. Khan's mouth opened in surprise when he saw an immense circular gorge replacing the simple plain, but he soon realized that he had barely scratched the surface of the area's secrets.

A circular metallic structure slowly unfolded in Khan's vision as he approached the gorge's edges. Scarlet symbols glowed on its smooth and dark surface, filling the entire area with a red halo that carried a chilling feeling.

'Is this technology?' Khan wondered when he noticed that the scarlet halo hid azure tubes near the base of the circular structure.

The building resembled a dome with a flat roof that fused the studies of two different species. Khan recognized the Niqols' old ways in the scarlet symbols, but he didn't fail to notice how the tubes were almost identical to those seen in the teleports. Moreover, the structure didn't have the iconic hidden doors seen in the other palaces. It had actual entrances marked with words written in the alien language.

"[Don't look at me for answers]," Liiza chuckled when she noticed Khan's questioning eyes on her. "[I also don't know much about this area. The new generations learn about these locations, but the actual knowledge arrives only after we become actual members of our tribes]."

"[The Global Army would pay any price to learn about this]," Khan commented after his eyes returned on the odd dome.

"[I know]," Liiza replied. "[We have similar buildings all around Nitis, but the older generations want us to study mana in its pure form before gaining access to technology. I can't disagree after watching the humans in battle, but I wonder if we could compromise a little]."

Khan sighed and brought Liiza closer to her chest. He knew what she was thinking. She wanted to improve the Niqols' society to prevent so many losses.

'Zalpa is right,' Khan thought as he caressed Liiza's hair. 'This generation will bring the Niqols to greater heights.'

"[Let's go]," Liiza eventually said in a sweet voice after leaving Khan's chest and taking his hand.

The canyon had steep staircases dug inside the ground that led to its bottom. The steps appeared unstable, but Khan confirmed that the red symbols on their surfaces granted them a metallic texture. The couple could reach the flat dome in no time, and Liiza quickly led him toward one of the tall entrances.

The red symbol on the entrance transformed into a palm-shaped figure when the couple approached it. Liiza pressed her hand there, and Khan noticed that a small bloodstain had appeared on the wall after she retracted her arm.

The symbol confirmed Liiza's identity and returned to its previous shape. Yet, it flashed with a soft light that didn't match the other runes on the structure.

"[An elder should come out soon]," Liiza explained while sitting in a spot right next to the entrance.

Khan sat next to Liiza, but she didn't hesitate to jump on his lap. The two rested in each other's embrace as they waited for the elder to arrive.

A few minutes had to pass before the dome's entrance opened and let a wave of dense mana flow out in the environment. The energy filled the entirety of the canyon, but the symbols on the structure quickly brightened and absorbed it, returning the area to its previous state.

Khan couldn't focus too much on that process since a heavy presence manifested itself after the entrance closed. A tall figure had appeared next to the Khan and Liiza, but neither had seen it leaving the dome.

"[I thought humans were still forbidden from seeing these areas]," A hoarse voice resounded in the area and applied heavy pressure on Khan.

Khan felt unable to move under that pressure. He could only raise his eyes to inspect the elder. The figure belonged to an old woman with long red hair and glowing scarlet eyes. Wrinkles filled her cold face, but her slender body seemed to brim with power.

"[He is-]," Liiza began to speak, but the elder interrupted her.

"[We receive reports from the various tribes]," The elder announced before fixing her intense gaze on Khan. "[You must be Khan]."

Khan wanted to stand up and bow, but the pressure didn't allow him to do anything. Cold sweat started to fall down his forehead as the elder continued to inspect him. He felt naked in front of those scarlet eyes. The Niqols seemed able to study every corner of his mind easily.

However, the pressure suddenly vanished when the elder revealed a warm smile and performed a polite bow. Khan remained speechless, and his surprise only intensified when the old Niqols spoke in a motherly tone. "[Thank you for taking care of my great-granddaughter. The whole tribe was worried about her. I'm glad that she had you during the crisis]."

'Great-granddaughter?!' Khan shouted in his mind before performing a timid nod and moving his eyes on Liiza.

Liiza blushed before diverting her gaze and laying her head on his chest. She was happy that the elder had acknowledged her relationship, but she couldn't stop thinking about the possible consequences of that event. Her relationship had become so serious that she inevitably considered taking it to the next step.

"[The situation must be tragic for you to be here]," The elder exclaimed while tapping the black surface of the dome a few times. "[Tell me everything]."

The wall soon opened to reveal a small compartment containing a big flask and three cups. The elder picked everything and poured the drinks before sitting in front of the couple. The three exchanged a silent toast before Liiza started her story.

The elders received updates, but they remained ignorant about many details. Liiza's great-grandmother knew about the attack on the valley, but she wasn't aware of its outcome. She also needed Liiza to describe the months before that to check whether Yeza had told her everything.

"[So, Yeza is dead]," The elder sighed. "[She would have become a great elder, but her legacy is equally promising]."

Liiza couldn't help but sniff at those words. Yeza's death was still too close to her mind, but she managed to suppress her grief and remain focused on the conversation.

"[It seems that the sunlight has only helped reveal problems rooted deeply in our society]," The elder continued. "[Maybe we are to blame for this outcome. We tried to evolve too quickly, without worrying about the consequences that progress could cause]."

Khan couldn't help but feel a strange detachment in the elder. She talked about Nitis' matters as if they didn't involve her. She had appeared sad about Yeza's death, but she didn't linger too long on that revelation.

"[What should we do now?]" Liiza asked after the elder fell silent.

"[Your role in this crisis is over]," The elder stated. "[The elders must step into the battlefield to prevent the annihilation of the younger generations. Go back to a safe area and wait for us to clear the planet. We'll hold a meeting to decide the Niqols' future after taking care of the monsters]."

"[That's it?]" Liiza questioned. "[What about the rebels? Won't they get any punishment?]"

"[Do you want us to reduce the Niqols' population even more?]" The elder asked. "[I can't blame them too much. They have seen their traditions crumble in a matter of decades. In their minds, they were only defending what made them true Niqols]."

"[But-!]" Liiza wanted to complain, but the elder raised a hand to interrupt her.

"[I'm sure some elders will mention this topic]," The old Niqols said, "[But these matters are outside your control now. Go back, rest, wash away the sorrow accumulated in this period. Your generation did well. I'm sure you'll create a better future]."

Those words didn't make Liiza happy, but she remained silent anyway. Khan sensed her grip on his robe tightening, so he decided to put an end to the meeting. He wrapped an arm around her waist and forced her to stand up with her before performing a polite bow.

"[Thank you, elder]," Khan exclaimed, and Liiza uttered similar words after suppressing her conflicting feelings.

"[I wouldn't thank us so soon]," The elder announced in an aloof tone.

Khan and Liiza raised their heads to inspect the elder, but they found themselves unable to speak when they saw that she started to levitate without breaking her sitting position.

"[I can see the intensity of your feelings]," The elder explained as she continued to rise toward the sky. "[I'll fight to give you a chance, but I don't think you should take it]."

Liiza and Khan didn't understand what she meant, but they kept their eyes on her figure as she flew higher in the sky and disappeared behind the dome's roof. The meeting was over, but the couple didn't feel glad about that. Something in the elder's words had given birth to a faint worry inside them.

Chapter 227 - Decision

Nitis appeared peaceful from the sky, but Khan and Liiza barely gazed at the surface while Snow flew back to the palace inside the mountain.

The two had informed Zalpa about the contents of the meeting, and she had decided to regroup in their previous safe area. Crossing long distances wasn't an issue now that the Aduns had returned, so she didn't mind leaving the couple alone for a few more days.

Khan and Liiza knew that their role in the crisis was over, but they couldn't disperse the worry that the elder's words had caused. Countless possibilities crossed their minds as they hugged each other silently. They didn't know what Liiza's great-grandmother meant, but they couldn't appease that awful sensation anyway.

'What can even happen?' Khan often found himself asking that question in his mind.

Khan didn't know what could cause problems after everything he had overcome. His friends' lives were safe now, and his relationship was stronger than ever. The humans had also silently acknowledged his importance among the Niqols. In theory, nothing could threaten his current position or source of happiness..

However, Khan continued to feel that something was off, and Liiza's worried face confirmed that he might have failed to consider something. She was as clueless as him, but she also sensed that something could threaten the state they had fought so hard to obtain.

Liiza and Khan didn't voice their worries since they lacked a proper source. They didn't need words to understand what was happening inside their minds. They limited themselves to immerse their minds in the peaceful sensations caused by their partner. A simple hug could make everything

disappear, and they did far more than that. Snow's back was a personal world that protected and cherished their love.

Days went by as Khan led Snow toward the solitary mountain containing the safe palace. The flight required many breaks that the couple didn't hesitate to stretch as long as possible. A lingering sadness still filled their minds, but they slowly dispersed it by relying on each other's presence.

Liiza's world had turned upside down, and the same had happened to Khan's mind. Their relationship and the many events in the past months had deeply affected their characters, and the faint peace brought by the elder's decision had forced them to face those changes.

Most changes were positive. Liiza had overcome her status as an outcast and had established herself among the Niqols. Instead, Khan had discovered a lot about himself. He had matured, and his feats on Nitis had turned him into a priceless asset. He felt sure that the Global Army would grant him countless benefits once it learnt about everything that had happened.

Still, both Liiza and Khan had to pay a steep price for those gains. They had to overcome Nitis' dark side and watch many of their friends fall. The blood and corpses that they had to leave behind added a disgusting taste to their happiness. At times, they found themselves wondering whether they deserved those beautiful feelings when so many didn't get the chance to experience them.

Liiza had been Khan's beacon of hope after Istrone, but they switched their roles after the meeting with the elder. He knew the emptiness that death could cause, and his support prevented Liiza from falling prey to her negative thoughts.

The world could be unfair, but that wasn't their fault, and Khan did everything in his power to make Liiza understand that part. They had done their best and lost a lot, but they had managed to return in each other's arms, and failing to cherish that lucky outcome would only insult those who didn't get that chance.

The mountain in the middle of the forest eventually appeared in their view. Snow landed near the waterfall, and the couple approached the secret entrance that opened on its own as soon as it sensed those familiar presences. Khan and Liiza could enter the palace in no time, and they quickly noticed how the atmosphere there reflected what was happening in their minds.

Zalpa's group had been closer to the palace, so they could reach it far earlier than the couple. Also, Khan and Liiza had traveled slowly, making them arrive at their destination a whole week after their companions.

The atmosphere that greeted them in the palace was quite grim. Doku and the others were sitting around a long table filled with food and drinks in the main hall. The smell of booze that filled the area revealed that their party had lasted more than a single day, but Khan and Liiza understood how they felt.

"[You are finally back]!" Azni groaned.

"[You know how they are]," Doku laughed while patting the girl sitting on his lap. "[I feel bad for Khan's Aduns]."

"[You can't blame them for seeking refuge in their emotions]," Ilman announced while trying to stand up, but a wave of dizziness filled his mind and forced him to fall back on his seat.

"[Did you leave something for us]?" Khan asked as a faint chuckle escaped his mouth.

"[You should hurry before George wakes up]," Havaa commented while poking the boy sleeping with his head on the table.

"[I'll have another cup]," George weakly said while trying to raise his head, but his girlfriend promptly pushed him down.

Khan and Liiza couldn't help but smile at that scene. Rejoining their friends felt good. They showed happy faces even when they looked at Paul and Kelly. The two humans were also sitting at the table, and their condition wasn't better than the others.

"How was the meeting?" Paul asked as he rubbed his face to try to disperse the hangover that filled his mind.

"I didn't join it," Khan lied while Liiza led him on an empty chair next to Doku and Azni.

"I get it!" Paul exclaimed. "It takes a woman to make you stick to the rules!"

"Paul, get some sleep," Kelly scolded before standing up and patting the squad leader's shoulder.

Paul showed a displeased expression, but he eventually put his cup aside and stood up. The two humans climbed the staircase together before disappearing into one of the corridors.

Liiza let Khan sit on the chair to take her place on his lap, and Azni quickly handed them a flask with two cups. The couple joined the drinking, but it was clear that the party was already over.

The group exchanged a few jokes, but they mostly remained silent. Ilman shouted chants from time to time, but his drunkenness eventually had the better of him and made him fall asleep on the table. Asyat wasn't in the best condition either, so she decided to return to her room after a while.

George woke up in time to discover that only Ilman and the three couples had remained on the table. His head hurt, but his feelings were worse. Still, Havaa didn't allow him to get another cup.

"[What happens now]?" George voiced an annoyed snort as he threw his head back and placed his feet on the table. "[Do we just pretend that the past months didn't happen]?"

"[I don't know]," Khan sighed, but a warm smile appeared on his face when Liiza took his head in her arms.

"[How are you two]?" Doku asked when he noticed that sweet interaction.

"[We went through the bad part]," Liiza exclaimed while caressing Khan's hair. "[Going back to normal is impossible, but that doesn't feel too sad anymore]."

"[Maybe we should also take a long trip]," Azni suggested in a surprised tone. "[How did you even accept to be happy when so many have died]?"

"[It's easier when you have already gone through something similar]," George commented while he continued to stare at the tall ceiling. "[You make everything bad disappear and focus on the good left in your life]."

"[When did you become so wise]?" Havaa teased.

"[I didn't do anything]," George scoffed. "[I owe everything to Khan, Professor Supyan, and you. I don't know what it would have become of me otherwise]."

Khan couldn't help but smile in front of George's earnest statement. He rejoiced to see that his friend was in a relatively good spot. The general sadness that filled the group was impossible to disperse in that short period, but George was better than many others due to what he had learnt on Nitis.

"[I wonder where Professor Supyan went]," Khan changed the topic. "[I haven't seen him since the events with that giant Lysixi]."

"[I hope he is safe]," George replied. "[Maybe I'll get to thank him one day]."

"[Does this feeling ever leave]?" Doku asked while moving his eyes between the two humans. "[How long does it take to feel better]?"

George straightened his head to glance at Doku, and his eyes soon moved on Khan. The latter was also glancing at him, and the two understood that their friend needed some moral support. The Niqols were resilient when it came to sadness, but the recent events had been too much even for them.

"[It doesn't leave]," Khan revealed.

"[But it does get better with time, especially if you have something good in your life]," George continued.

Doku heaved a helpless sigh, and Azni laid her head on his shoulder while wearing a similar expression. They both remained silent for a few seconds before Doku cracked a joke. "[I guess I need to get drunk with you all often]."

"[That's the fate of every good soldier]!" George exclaimed as he tried to reach the cup in front of him, but Havaa promptly slapped his hand.

The others laughed at that scene, but they all felt that the party was over. It didn't take much before they silently decided to stand up and return to their rooms.

The situation improved during the following days. A sad atmosphere continued to envelop the group, but they slowly dealt with it. The parties and their Aduns helped a lot, especially now that all the survivors had reunited. They even flew together from time to time, even if they remained in the areas around the mountain.

The group finally experienced a taste of the peace obtained after fighting for entire months. At first, it felt strange to be without worries, but they slowly accepted that new state. All of them started to laugh more often, and no one bothered to train.

Khan and Liiza almost forgot about the elder's words as they accepted their return to a normal life. The process was slow, but each day looked brighter than the previous. They could spend time among friends and loved ones without having the fate of the planet on their shoulders. They could finally be carefree kids again, and life couldn't get better than that.

Nevertheless, the world wasn't over with them. The group had noticed that the number of monsters in the surrounding areas had fallen during that peaceful period. Khan and the others had never seen battles, but they could confirm that someone was hunting those dangerous creatures.

The hunts decided by the elders had clearly started, and they were obviously going well. Khan and the others almost couldn't believe how quickly the monsters disappeared from the regions around the mountain, and that process seemed to affect even areas farther away. The students and recruits weren't the only ones going back to normal. Nitis was also retrieving its peace.

The process inevitably reminded Khan and Liiza about the elder's words. They didn't know when the meeting among those powerful figures would happen, but that event grew closer as the monsters continued to disappear. The couple would soon learn about Nitis' future, and that knowledge brought the previous unsettling worry back.

Azni and the other noticed how Khan and Liiza grew distracted, but they never questioned them about the issue. Everyone was reacting to Nitis' peace differently, and the couple's situation was unique, so it didn't feel right to probe the two when they didn't say anything about their problems.

The worries culminated during a seemingly ordinary afternoon. Khan's group, Kelly, and Paul were enjoying their lunch when Zalpa appeared in the main hall. The old Niqols had never left the palace's basement in that period, so her arrival attracted everyone's attention.

Zalpa wore an aloof expression, but her eyes fell on Liiza and Khan before she took a deep breath and explained the reason behind her presence in the hall. "[The elders have come to the conclusion that the Niqols as a whole need to retrieve their harmony before opening themselves to foreign cultures. They want all the humans to leave the planet. They didn't specify for how long]."

Chapter 228 - Future

The worries that had filled Khan and Liiza's minds in the last period finally took form, and they appeared as awful as they had feared. The two were sitting on the same chair since the lunch had already reached the drinking part, but they instinctively dropped their cups to fall in a tight embrace.

"[That's bullshit]!" Azni shouted, but Zalpa raised her hand to silence eventual complaints.

"[The elders feel that the Niqols are too divided right now]," Zalpa explained. "[They believe that we won't be able to find a true unity until we spend some years without external influences. Still, they promise that they will warn the humans once they plan to reopen Nitis to other species]."

"[How many years do you think they'll make us wait]?" Paul asked in a cold tone.

"[I can't say for sure]," Zalpa replied before pointing at Paul and Kelly. "[You two should warn your superiors about this decision. They will need the elders' help to contact the rest of your species and plan the departure, so send them to me in a couple of hours]."

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Paul nodded before following Zalpa's hand with his eyes. The old Niqols used two fingers to point at the two interspecies couples on the table while voicing more orders. "[You four, come with me. Let's talk in private]."

Everyone on the table inevitably moved their eyes on the two couples. Khan mostly saw worries in his friends' gazes, but he couldn't address those feelings in his current situation. His mind was a mess held together by hope and Liiza's coldness, and the same went for her.

The two couples followed Zalpa inside the second basement and halted their steps after the old Niqols stopped at the center of the area. Zalpa turned and remained silent as she inspected the four worried faces in front of her.

Zalpa pitied the two couples a bit, but it wasn't her place to contradict the elders, especially when she agreed with their decision. The Niqols' society was in pieces right now. The sunlight had uncovered problems that had lasted even before the arrival of the humans on the planet. Her species needed time to decide how to move forward, and unity was necessary for the vast political environment of the universe.

"[The elders don't want this to look like a punishment]," Zalpa resumed their explanation. "[The Niqols are at their weakest right now, and our whole society requires an overhaul. We can't do that with other species roaming the planet and pursuing their political interests]."

"[Zalpa, the humans have shed blood for the Niqols]," Khan complained in a disappointed tone. "[Young recruits have died in battles that you have ordered us to fight. How can we even accept this after everything we have been through]?"

"[I'm sure the humans will get something from the elders]," Zalpa replied. "[You only have to wait for your superiors to contact them]."

"[I thought we were the cold ones]," George commented, doing his best not to sound cold.

Zalpa didn't miss the coldness radiated by the couples, but she also felt glad that they didn't immediately berate her. Khan, George, Liiza, and Havaa knew that the Niqols had led them in the basement for a reason, and they hoped that it would concern their relationships.

Khan noticed how a tinge of worry appeared on Zalpa's face, but she dispersed it by taking a deep breath. Her expression returned aloof as she explained the reason behind that private meeting. "[The elders won't force anyone to remain on Nitis. You can leave with your partners if your feelings don't allow you to separate]."

Hope inevitably filled the two couples. They were both holding hands, and their grip tightened when they felt that their separation wasn't mandatory. Of course, they had yet to analyze Zalpa's words fully, but that could come later.

"[However]," Zalpa added before the couples could cheer, "[The elders can't turn you into ambassadors since the Niqols have yet to gain unity. They can't send you into political missions when you still don't know what goals you have to pursue]."

"[What does that mean]?" Liiza promptly asked.

"[It means that the Niqols won't be responsible for your actions]," Zalpa declared after heaving a deep sigh. "[You won't be able to contact Nitis after your departure, and you will also lose the privileges connected to your tribes since you won't take part in this important social process]."

"[Are the elders testing us]?" Havaa exploded. "[Do they want to see who is loyal to their species? What nonsense is this]?"

"[Please, calm down]," Zalpa pleaded. "[The elders have to prioritize the Niqols as a whole. Giving you a chance to leave is already a lot]."

"[Sure]!" Havaa shouted. "[They are only forcing us to decide between our species and our partners. That sounds totally fair]!"

"[I thought that the Niqols had a deeper respect for feelings]," George mocked while pulling Havaa in his embrace to calm her down.

"[We do]," Zalpa stated, "[But the elders can't predict that the Niqols will become after this period. They might decide to put limits to the external influences indefinitely, making those who leave unable to become proper members of the new society]."

"[Are you implying that the rebels can win]?" Liiza asked in a chilling tone.

"[I don't think that will ever happen]," Zalpa admitted. "[I'm only trying to explain the reasons behind this decision. You can remain on Nitis and help build an open-minded society, or leave and live your feelings. You can't have both]."

The elder's words finally became clear in Khan and Liiza's minds. The couple also started to consider her suggestion. Liiza's great-grandmother wanted the two to refuse the chance to remain together.

"[The decision is final]," Zalpa declared. "[It will take some time for the humans here to establish a connection with their superiors, but the day of the departure will eventually arrive. I suggest you start thinking about it immediately. Your choice will affect your future deeply]."

The two couples understood that the conversation was over. Zalpa wanted to say much more, but it wasn't her place to affect that decision. She couldn't bear that responsibility. Liiza and Havaa had to pick a path on their own to avoid regrets, especially since they would have to live with that choice for the rest of their lives.

Liiza had never held Khan's hand so tightly, but he barely felt that. The worry caused by the elders' decision had emptied him of every other sensation. He couldn't stop thinking about the issue, and conflicting opinions surged in his mind as he inspected the situation from different perspectives.

Khan would never pick a path that would cause problems in his relationship. Liiza was the best part of his life. He had given his everything to preserve what he had with her, but he couldn't have power over that decision. She had to choose what was best for her.

When Khan imagined himself in Liiza's shoes, he could guess the battle happening in her mind. Liiza had always been an outcast among the Niqols, so severing her ties with her species would only bring her to her previous state. Yet, that would also force her to depend on Khan for everything since he would become her only social connection in the entire universe.

Moreover, Liiza had just seen her mother giving her life to save her. She had finally become a proper member of the Niqols' society, and her tribe expected a lot from her. Liiza would be perfect to lead her species toward greater heights since she respected the old ways without forsaking the importance of progress. She could become a splendid ambassador.

Except for Paul and Kelly, the others had remained on the table in the main hall. A series of curious and worried eyes fell on the two couples when they came out of the basement, but no questions resounded after seeing their pensive and ugly expressions. Azni and Doku wanted to say something, but Ilman ended up glaring at them when he noticed their behavior.

The two couples couldn't muster the strength to move their gazes on their friends. They had too much to consider, so they approached the staircases to return to their rooms silently. The others could only let them go since they sensed how heavy the atmosphere among them was.

Each step that Khan made toward his room echoed in his chest. He felt hammers hitting his heart as he approached the inevitable conversation. He felt the need to grab Liiza, run on Snow's back, and leave toward regions where those problems didn't exist, but he never let those delusional dreams take control of his actions.

The two couples separated without saying any words. George and Havaa were the first to disappear behind a door, but the same soon happened to Liiza and Khan. The two found themselves in the familiar barren room, and they instinctively moved to the bed.

Khan and Liiza continued to hold hands as they sat on the bed. They remained silent as they fixed their eyes on the azure symbol on the wall in front of them. They let the glow of the rune distract them for a few seconds, but that effect soon ended and forced them to talk.

"[I-]," Khan began to speak, but Liiza promptly placed a finger on his mouth.

"[Not now]," Liiza said in a pleading tone before pushing Khan on the bed.

Liiza then laid her head on his shoulder and wrapped his arm around her waist. One of her hands went under his robe to envelop his side in her fingers. Instead, the other closed on his clothes, holding them as tightly as she could.

"[I want you to choose what's best for you]," Khan announced after Liiza remained silent for a whole minute.

"[And I want to choose what's best for you]," Liiza giggled. "[We can't find a solution, so let's not decide]."

"[Liiza]," Khan called her in a scolding tone.

Liiza giggled again before uncovering his shoulder and leaving a soft kiss there. She then pulled herself closer to Khan before tracing the edges of his scar with her fingers. She seemed to fall in a daze, but a request eventually came out of her mouth. "[Describe what would happen if I left with you]."

Khan's eyes flickered, but he forced himself to think about the matter seriously when he noticed the seriousness in Liiza's face. He sorted his thoughts for a few seconds before wearing a smile and starting his story. "[The Global Army won't be able to refuse our requests. I should be the most promising ambassador in the world, and your knowledge is priceless. You'll find a place among the humans in no time, and I'll make sure never to leave you alone]."

"[What happens after that]?" Liiza asked.

"[We would go back to Earth at some point]," Khan continued, "[And you would force me to talk to my father. Your presence probably wouldn't change the outcome of that conversation, but I know that I would still feel grateful to you]."

"[Then]," Liiza asked as she adjusted her position on his shoulder.

"[We would probably get married]," Khan said as a warm smile appeared on his face. "[I don't really know how it works, nor where we would live, but I'm sure that everything would be fine as long as we are together]."

"[What about kids]?" Liiza timidly asked. "[Do you want them]?"

Khan had never really considered that topic, but Liiza's question forced him to think about it, and his smile only broadened when he imagined a happy family with her.

"[I think I want them]," Khan whispered, "[With you at least]."

"[I feel the same]," Liiza revealed. "[I wonder if our different species would cause problems]."

"[We would rely on the Global Army for that]," Khan reassured. "[I would only wait for me to fix the nightmares issue. You know, I'd rather avoid passing them to our kids]."

"[I would be able to oversee your progress with mana if I came with you]," Liiza stated. "[I'm sure you would go back to a messy state without me]."

"[I won't answer that]," Khan chuckled.

"[Don't you want to affect my decision at least a little]?" Liiza asked while raising her head toward Khan's face.

Khan turned his head to look at Liiza, and his smile became even warmer as he answered. "[I'm afraid of what I might force you to do]."

"[I know two languages]," Liiza said, "[But I can't find the words to describe how much I love you]."

"[It's the same for me]," Khan admitted while turning toward Liiza and pulling her until their whole bodies met. "[I feel saved every time you look at me]."

The two kissed each other before letting their foreheads touch. Their minds were a mess of fears, worries, and desires, but none of those emotions appeared on their faces while they focused on the sensations radiated by their partner. They were at peace even among that chaos, even if they both knew that she would eventually have to make a decision.

"[Hey, let's take a few days to think about it]," Liiza suggested. "[Help me clear my head while we still have time]."

"[You sure like to use nice words to ask for sex]," Khan teased.

"[Shut up and kiss me, dummy]," Liiza complained, but her pout melted when Khan's warm lips fell on her mouth.

Chapter 229 - Promise

Liiza and Khan didn't talk about the elders' decision, but time wasn't on their side.

Lieutenant Kintea immediately started to work with Zalpa to contact the elders and come up with a solution for the current situation of his troops. The crisis had ended up destroying the teleport, so the humans needed the Niqols' help to contact their superiors and plan the migration from the planet.

The elders didn't hesitate to reveal part of their technology to help the humans in the matter. Lieutenant Kintea and the other two surviving soldiers obtained a beacon capable of sending messages in space, and they quickly activated it to contact the superiors. The Global Army had a telescope placed right outside Nitis' solar system, so it didn't take much for an answer to arrive.

Everything became easier after establishing a connection with the Global Army. The elders allowed the humans to bring a small space station near Nitis to start the departure, and Lieutenant Kintea kept his underlings updated about the process. Soon, only one day remained before the arrival of the vehicle that would put an end to the political missions on the alien planet.

Khan and Liiza had spent that period as if the inevitable departure didn't exist. They had enjoyed themselves as much as possible between parties and passionate moments, and their friends didn't question them about the issue..

George had never been able to keep secrets for himself, especially after drinking. Azni and the others had learnt that the two couples had a chance to remain together, but their options were equally awful. They couldn't even begin to imagine what Havaa and Liiza were going through in that period, so they did their best to pretend that everything was normal.

Zalpa didn't come out of her basement at all. She knew how harsh the situation was, and she was worried that her presence would affect the two girls' decision.

Zalpa wanted Liiza and Havaa to remain on Nitis, but both of them were pretty rebellious. She was afraid that her actions would push them to leave the planet. The old Niqols pitied both couples, especially Khan's, but her mind remained set on helping the separation with her absence.

Paul, Kelly, the two soldiers, and the Lieutenant had also spent most of that period in their rooms. They had never bonded with the Niqols too much, and they didn't want to be around parties that didn't welcome them. They simply waited for the day when they could finally leave that planet to arrive.

Khan spent the day before the departure peacefully. He took Snow for a long flight and did his best to explain what would happen. The Aduns didn't fully understand his words, but the feelings that seeped past the mental connection gave it an idea of the imminent separation.

The Aduns were Tainted animals with high resilience to different atmospheres, but Khan had seen what the sunlight had done to them. In theory, he could take Snow with him, but the many different environments he would have to explore in his missions would only hurt the eagle. Khan would be forced to leave Snow in a safe area many times, and he didn't want that sad outcome for his loyal companion.

Snow didn't take that news happily. It took many detours and flew recklessly while returning to the mountain. The Aduns hoped to ruin Khan's departure by arriving late to the castle, but he slowly calmed it down. The eagle could only give up and drop him near the waterfall angrily when it understood that the event was inevitable.

A party welcomed his return to the palace. No one wanted to address the lingering sadness in the hall, so everyone did their best to celebrate as hard as possible.

Khan lost himself in the joyful faces of his friends and partner. His problems didn't exist when he remained immersed in those affectionate gestures, jokes, and laughs. Part of him even believed to have found true happiness in those short hours, but the celebration inevitably came to an end.

Doku and Ilman limited themselves to nod when they saw that Khan and Liiza started to leave the main hall, but Azni jumped on him to perform a tight hug. The girl didn't say anything, but a faint sniff resounded when she left his chest and hid her face to return to her boyfriend.

Azni's gesture broke the illusion created by the party, but the couple didn't fall prey to their emotions. Khan and Liiza quickly approached the staircase and walked slowly toward their room. They never left their partner's hand during the stroll, but the reality of the situation became impossible to deny after the door closed behind them.

"[Liiz-]," Khan tried to say, but Liiza promptly jumped on him and trapped his lips in a long kiss.

The kiss felt almost violent. Liiza wrapped her arms and legs around his neck and waist, forcing him to hold her from her butt. She then pulled his hair in a desperate attempt to make him walk toward the bed, but he couldn't let her spend more time without talking.

"[Liiza]," Khan said in a scolding tone when he managed to free his lips from Liiza's desperate passion.

"[No, we still have time]," Liiza pleaded while trying to reach his mouth again, but Khan pushed her on the wall and pressed with his waist to support her without needing his arms. His hand went on her hair and pulled it to trap her head.

"[So rough]," Liiza teased as a captivating smile appeared on her face, but Khan mustered the entirety of his self-restraint to remain focused on the issue.

"[Liiza, I need to know]," Khan begged while making their foreheads touch. "[Please, we need to talk about this before it's too late]."

Liiza sighed and released the grip on his waist to place her feet on the floor. Khan took a step back and let her leave the wall, and she seemed to calm down as a warm smile appeared on her face.

"[We switched position]," Liiza giggled while placing a hand on his cheek. "[I'm the one who doesn't want to talk now]."

"[The reason didn't change]," Khan smiled while taking Liiza's hand. "[Talking will force the rest of the world to become real]."

Liiza's smile broadened, but tears suddenly appeared on the corners of her eyes and made her leave Khan. She turned to walk toward the bed, but she never sat there. Khan kept his eyes on her back and noticed how her hands closed into tight fists.

"[I thought about it, a lot]," Liiza whispered without turning. "[I've given my everything to inspect all my options. Honestly, I would choose to remain with you even if that meant going through a hundred crises]."

Tears appeared in Khan's eyes, but he suppressed them. Everything about him wanted to jump on Liiza, take her in a tight embrace, and tell her that they would be fine, but he had to wait for her speech to end. He could already sense that a "but" was about to arrive.

"[Yet, I couldn't stop thinking about all the warnings]," Liiza continued. "[We both know that our relationship isn't completely healthy. We rely on our love to save ourselves from the grim aspects of our lives. Our feelings resemble an addiction]."

Liiza sniffed, and Khan instinctively took a step ahead, but the girl voiced a plead when she sensed that gesture. "[Wait! I won't be able to finish if I sense your warmth]."

Khan closed his eyes to calm down before retracting his leg. A wet sensation spread on his right cheek, but he ignored it to focus on his girlfriend again.

"[Mana hurried us into a relationship]," Liiza explained. "[Our feelings have exploded as soon as our lips met. Still, I wonder if they did that for the wrong reasons. I can't help but hear my mother's warnings in my mind, and we both know that she might be right. We are broken, and we are partially using each other to remain in one piece]."

Khan couldn't deny that statement. He and Liiza had also acknowledged the toxic aspects of their relationship long ago, but they had decided to fix them together slowly. However, the elders' decision had changed their situation in ways that forced them to reevaluate that choice.

"[I wish we had time to heal together]," Liiza cried. "[I wish I wouldn't have to choose between you and my species. I wish that my mother's death didn't make all of this harder than it is, but how can I leave my tribe after she died to save me? How can I abandon the Niqols after they suffered so much]?"

Khan stepped forward when he saw tears falling next to Liiza's feet. He hugged her before he could even attempt to stop himself, and she immediately clung her hands to his arms. Khan sensed something wet spreading from her palms. It seemed that she had cut herself with her fingernails.

"[We can still do both]," Khan pleaded as tears fell from his eyes. "[You can still come with me and return to Nitis after the elders reopen their borders. It doesn't matter if the rebels win. We can always make them change their minds later]."

Liiza sobbed before patting Khan's arms. He relaxed his embrace and allowed her to turn. Their eyes met, and more tears fell from them when they noticed the sad expression of their partner. They almost couldn't believe how something so intense and beautiful was causing such deep pain.

"[Khan, if you ask me to follow you, I wouldn't be able to refuse]," Liiza admitted in a pleading tone as her hands grabbed the opening in his robe. "[However, love shouldn't be like this, right? I should have a choice. I want to be able to refuse and still decide to be with you]."

Khan opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out of it. He wanted to tell her to follow him. Everything inside him was screaming to beg her to move in the Global Army, but he found himself unable to voice requests that could hurt her.

"[Khan, Khan, listen to me]," Liiza cried while taking his face in her hands. "[We have been incredibly lucky to find each other. Our timing was simply off. We can't appreciate what we have until we fix each other, but that requires growing without the safety of our love]."

"[I don't want to go back to a world without you]," Khan revealed, "[But you can't be happy with me, not right now. I'm only afraid that I might lose you forever]."

"[Remember my mother's words]," Liiza replied as a warm smile appeared on her face. "[Mana made us find each other. Believe that it will do the same after we have fixed our issues. Let's live our lives and grow to a point when we can truly love. I know that we will meet again then]."

"[I will search for my happiness without you only if you promise me to do the same]," Khan stated. "[You won't be able to grow if you cling to the hope of meeting me again]."

"[Dummy]!" Liiza sobbed. "[I had to say that. Don't hurt yourself for me even now]."

"[What can you even do? Break up with me]?" Khan joked as tears continued to fall from his eyes.

Liiza smiled, but her sobs became too hard to suppress in front of that separation. She hid her face on Khan's neck and cried loudly as she realized what was happening.

"[Why am I so sure that I won't love anyone else so deeply]?" Liiza cried without leaving Khan's neck.

"[It's the same for me]," Khan confessed as he took her head in his arms. "[You have cursed me forever]."

Liiza left Khan's neck and fixed her eyes on his face. She loved him so much, but they only had a night left together, and she knew exactly how she wanted to spend it.

"[Let's enjoy this curse one last time]," Liiza sniffed while wiping away her tears with Khan's robe. "[I won't cry. Promise that you will do the same]."

"[I promise]," Khan said while wiping away his tears. "[Let's not ruin this memory]."

Liiza nodded, and the two kissed before falling prey to their passion. Everything grew hazy as they lost each other in their raging emotions, but neither of them managed to stick to their promise.

Chapter 230 - Departure

Azure lights appeared on Nitis' dark sky early in the morning. The scene initially scared some Niqols due to the resemblance with the crisis, but the true nature of the event became clear in a matter of minutes.

The lack of clouds made the space station's arrival impossible to miss. The giant vehicle resembled a large star that had flown too close to Nitis' orbit. The azure light radiated by its neon and glowing tubes filled the sky in its surroundings and created a bright patch that tried to shine on the surface.

Orders appeared in each room of the palace and warned everyone about the imminent departure. The humans had to leave, so formal salutations became mandatory. Still, Azni and the others didn't need orders to gather past the lake next to the mountain and wait for their friends to come out.

Lieutenant Kintea, the two soldiers, Kelly, and Paul were the first to leave the mountain and cross the narrow passage that led on the other side of the lake. The Niqols on the scene didn't hesitate to perform bows when the group reached them, but nothing else happened. The humans crossed them to stare at the smaller light that had separated from the halo created by the space station.

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The Niqols also moved their eyes on that descending glowing dot. Soon, the silhouette of a small spaceship became visible in the dark sky. It only took a few minutes to reach the surface and land in an empty spot.

Azni, Iman, Doku, and Asyat remained astonished in front of the spaceship's speed. They inspected its three engines and its curved front, but their eyes soon went on the five humans marching forward. Lieutenant Kintea's group didn't hesitate to approach the vehicle.

The group on Niqols inspected the spaceship's insides after it opened its metal doors, but they eventually turned to examine the waterfall. Two humans had yet to come out of the mountain, and anxiety built inside the students as they prepared themselves to say goodbye.

Two figures eventually became visible on the narrow passage. George and Havaa held their hands as they crossed the lake and reached the Niqols. The couple then exchanged a long kiss, but Havaa pushed George away when her tears became impossible to contain. The girl turned to run back inside the mountain as her sobs resounded in the area.

"[I wish things were different]," George commented while showing a sad smile toward the students.

"[Make sure not to drink too much once you get back among the humans]," Doku winked before reaching George to hug him.

"[No recruit would be able to keep up with me anyway]," George scoffed before separating from Doku and falling prey to Azni's embrace.

"[Take care of yourself, George]," Azni whispered. "[Don't cause any mess]."

"[I'm a responsible soldier]!" George complained, and the couple exploded into a laugh.

"[I hope to see you again soon]," Asyat uttered after Azni let George go.

"[I'll come back to Nitis as soon as possible]," George replied before exchanging a short hug with the girl.

"[Don't forget the Niqols' way]!" Ilman shouted as he ran toward George and squeezed his head between his arms.

"[Why are you always so intense]?" George cursed but laughs soon accompanied his words.

"[Nothing can stop my raging feelings]!" Ilman declared before letting George go and patting his shoulders a few times.

"[I'll miss you too]," George announced as he took a step back to escape Ilman.

George performed a polite bow toward the adult Niqols on the scene and began to approach the spaceship, but a dark figure suddenly descended on him and slammed him on the ground. The boy found himself trapped in his Aduns' pecks and laughs inevitably escaped his mouth.

"I will miss you too!" George laughed as he hugged the Aduns' neck and straightened his position.

"Make sure to eat a lot and find a good companion. I don't want to see you without a partner when I'll return to Nitis."

The Aduns screeched toward the sky and snuggled its head on George's chest one last time before setting off and disappearing in the darkness of the sky. The boy could only heave a helpless sigh at that sight, and a single tear fell from his eyes as he turned toward the students.

"[Take care of Havaa for me]," George requested. "[Don't let her remain fixated on me]."

"[She will forget you in no time]," Azni mocked, but the warm smile that appeared on her face and made George nod happily.

"[Thank you for everything]," George exclaimed after performing a polite bow. "[Please, make sure to convey my gratitude to Professor Supyan if he is still alive]."

"[You can count on us]," Doku announced, and George finally found the courage to turn and reach the spaceship.

The students turned toward the waterfall after George disappeared inside the spaceship. Their anxiety increased as they waited for Khan to appear, but something else distracted them and made their eyes move on the sky.

A screech resounded in the sky as another Aduns flew in the area and landed next to the spaceship. An adult Niqols jumped off her eagle while carrying a human covered in thick chains. The boy had his mouth, hands, and legs bound by those chinking items, but the students didn't fail to recognize him. It seemed that Rodney had survived the crisis in the safety of his prison.

The adult Niqols didn't waste time. She threw Rodney inside the spaceship before jumping back on her Aduns and setting off. The students didn't have the chance to express their disgust toward the boy since Lieutenant Kintea took care of securing him on a seat on the other side of the vehicle.

The scene had added a filthy feeling to the tension that enveloped the students, but everything disappeared when they saw a figure leaving the waterfall. Khan marched on the narrow passage, but he was alone.

Azni covered her mouth, and tears began to form in her eyes when Khan revealed a faint smile toward his friends. The sadness radiated by his expression was impossible to describe by simple words, and the students seemed able to experience it as he drew close.

"[She couldn't make it]," Khan quickly explained, but he couldn't add anything else since Azni jumped on him.

Doku joined his girlfriend in the embrace, and Khan could only pat their backs as he tried to commit to memory the coldness radiated by their bodies. He almost couldn't believe that he had grown so close to the two aliens in little more than half a year.

"[I'll watch over her and find a way to make you end together]," Azni promised.

"[Azni, it's fine]," Khan said in an affectionate tone while patting her head. "[This goodbye is only temporary. I'll see you all again sooner or later]."

"[But you were so-]," Azni continued as tears started to fall from her eyes, but Doku covered her mouth to make her stop.

Azni glared at Doku, but she understood her mistake when she noticed that Khan's eyes had also started to produce tears. The girl felt incredibly sorry, but Khan shook his head suppressed his sadness to reveal a warm smile.

"[I want the greatest party of all time once we reunite]," Khan laughed.

"[You can count on me]," Doku proudly announced. "[The entirety of Nitis will learn to respect the importance of my parties. I'll become an authority in every celebration]!"

"[Don't put strange ideas in his mind]," Azni complained now that Doku had let her mouth go.

"[Remember that I'll have to deal with him in these years]."

"[I don't want you to get bored]" Khan winked, and Doku exploded into a laugh in front of Azni's pout.

The two Niqols didn't want to let Khan go, but a screech soon resounded above them. The three wanted to glance at the sky, but a mass of white feathers slammed them on the ground before they could understand what was happening.

"[Snow]!" Khan scolded before exploding into a happy laugh.

The Aduns sat on Khan and prevented him from standing up. Snow even screeched proudly to announce its superiority, but Khan could sense through the mental connection that the eagle was trying to keep him on the planet.

"[We have talked about this]," Khan whispered as he ruffled Snow's feathers. "[You need to keep an eye on Liiza for me, okay? I must leave, but I can't do that with an easy mind unless I know that both of you will be fine]."

Snow screeched again, but sadness seeped in its voice at that time. Khan could only continue to ruffle its feathers until the eagle decided to let him stand up.

"[You are the best Aduns on the entire planet]," Khan declared while hugging Snow's neck, and the eagle lowered its head to voice another sad screech.

Doku and Azni remained silent in front of that scene. They could relate to the sadness in Snow's voice. Khan had become an important member of their lives, but he would have to leave for many years now.

Snow eventually left Khan and flew toward the peak of the mountain, disappearing among the dark sky. He could sense that the Aduns was still nearby, and he even understood its reasons. The eagle wanted to wait for Liiza to come out of the palace.

'Good boy,' Khan thought before finding another pair of arms around his neck.

Asyat hugged Khan tightly, and the latter didn't hesitate to do the same. The two didn't say anything, but that gesture was enough to express that they would both miss each other.

The next salutes ended up being far rougher than the others. Ilman jumped on Khan as soon as Asyat let him go and wrapped his arms around his torso to lift him.

"[Don't you dare to forget about me]!" Ilman shouted as he waved Khan left and right. "[What are years compared to our friendship]?!"

Khan laughed and let Ilman do what he wanted with him. The boy was almost more violent than Snow while he expressed his affection. Khan didn't even notice that the upper part of his robe had fallen by the time he returned to the ground.

"[You never change, do you]?" Khan laughed as he covered his shoulders, but a series of stunned gazes filled his vision during the process.

Doku's mouth had opened in surprise, Asyat's eyes had widened, Ilman had fallen silent, and Azni had started to cry even harder than before at the sight of the rune on Khan's shoulder.

"[Right]," Khan helplessly sighed as he inspected his tattoo for a few seconds before covering it again.

"[No, no]," Azni muttered. "[You can't leave. I'm sure that even the elde-]."

"[Azni]," Khan interrupted her. "[We have already made up our minds. As I said, this isn't goodbye. We'll all meet again. Take care of her and yourselves]."

"[This is so unfair!]" Azni shouted, but Doku promptly took her in his arms and prevented her from speaking any further.

"[You should leave before she tries to take down your ride]," Doku suggested as a sad smile appeared on his face.

"[I'll see you soon, my friends]," Khan declared before turning, performing a bow toward the adult Niqols, and approaching the spaceship.

Tears wanted to come out of Khan's eyes, but he suppressed them. A tinge of hesitation filled his body when he was about to step on the spaceship, but the memories of the previous night eventually gave him enough strength to proceed. He had to leave to learn how to love correctly.

Every event experienced on Nitis filled his vision as he walked toward the first empty seat that he found, and everything culminated with the memories of the last night. The promise and that goodbye filled with tears darkened his face and made him desire to remain alone. He felt the desperate need to see Liiza, but she had made the right decision. Neither of them would have been able to separate if they could gaze at their partner during those final moments.

The noise caused by the metal doors of the spaceship made Khan raise his eyes. He noticed Rodney, but his mind didn't allow him to think about the boy now. His gaze went on the outside world where he saw that all his friends had started to cry. Khan only managed to show one last smile before the vehicle sealed its entrances and set off.