

***** walked into the kitchen, stretching his arms out. Letting out a yawn.

“Good morning Mom,”

“Hmm? Oh good morning,” his mom replied, looking over wooden tablets containing bills meant to give funding to projects proposed to the Leviathan Kin sects Elders counsel.

He sat down, a foot giving his spicy-smelling porridge and Ko’i’u. A vegetable dish fermented with earthy spices and lime juice squeezed over it.

After taking a bite of the Ko’i’u ***** said, “So where are we going to watch the Wanderers wandering tonight.”

“What?” His mom said, looking up, looking confused.

“Where are we seeing the Wanderer-”

His mother cut him off, “We saw it two days ago, remember...?”

“Oh, um...” He trailed off, an awkward silence descending over them, “Mornings, am I right.” he capped the moment with an even more awkward joke.

His mother snorted, and went back to her reading, casually spooning the porridge into her mouth.

Well, that was a little worrying. Why didn’t he remember seeing the sun bloom? Don’t worry, it’s the morning, you’re drowsy, you’ll remember it later. Yeah, that was right. He went back to eating his food, taking his time since it wasn’t a school day.

After finishing he stood up, going back to his room.

Then his mother called out to him with a questioning lilt, “Where are you going?”

“Bed.”

“You have training tonight.”

“It’s Xu’i, isn’t it?”

“No, it Shu’i.”

“Hu, must’ve miscounted. Sorry.”

“No worries, but you’re probably going to have to run,” She looked up at the silver-plated Sea Pearl clock on the Black unpainted wooden wall that had flowers carved into it, “You’re already running five minutes late.

The blood drained from *****’s face, “Sky’s damn it!”

OOO

***** dropped himself onto the flattened grass, shaded by the bland one-story tall building that used to be a house from the students of the Leviathan Kin sect. But was now used as storage for training tools. He’d had to run the mountainous path used as warm-up twice after showing up late. And in the same time as the people now climbing up the steep final stretch up the hill, all after running full tilt up the mountain to get to the training ground.

Coming from the cloud of dust that stung his nose, stinging his eyes, and settled on his tongue. Making the blood taste in his mouth from the over-exercise even worse. A rush of a few people in the front, followed by the thunderous sound of the larger group of trainees coming over the ridge. Most of them were of cheap blood though, he didn’t understand why the Leviathan Kin allowed the commoners in, there was a reason why nobles were nobles

***** sat up, taking time to convince his body to stand up so he didn’t get trampled. After standing up something grabbed his shoulders from behind. Making him jump, turning around, regretting the complaints from his body. He saw Kulo’i. The bastard giggling.

“Sorry, sorry,” He said, “Couldn’t resist.”

***** muttered some curses

“So, you going to my party tonight?”

“What party?”

“You know, the one I invited you to,” he said with a condescending tone.

“You didn’t-,” he sighed, “Fine, I’ll go.”

Kulo’i sometimes did stuff like this. He’d pretend that you’d agreed to something, then get all offended if you refused and made a big fuss about it. And he could get away with it since he was the son of the Sects Patriarch, even against nobles like him. Though he usually didn’t do it,

since if he did the family could lash back in ways the cheap bloods couldn't. And anyway, he liked to party, one time he'd woken up in a cell with a splitting headache. He'd started a fight, he didn't remember it since he'd blacked out halfway through the night.

"Cool. It's at the old warehouse on the barren side of the island. Just in case you've forgotten that to."

"Ok, ok," ***** said exasperated.

Then they heard the whistle of Nuo'eki, the Senior in charge of training them. And he pushed the party out of his mind for now, focusing on the Senior.

OOO

That Night

***** walked across the beach in black dress robes, embroidered with golden sea spider silk in the shape of plumeria flowers. The waves sloshed against the porcelain white sand, the water glowing a cosmic blue whenever it moved. The salty sea spray hit ***** exposed skin, cooling him down on the warm summer night. And perfuming the air with the pleasantly bitter salt, settling on his tongue when he breathed it in. The damp sand inside his wooden open-toe sandals irritated him beyond no end. Making him stop to brush it off every 70 steps or so, slowing him down.

But that was his goal, to arrive late. Depths it would be satisfying to see Kulo'i's annoyed face. He could complain about him arriving late but he couldn't say he'd done it intentionally. The attention hog deserved more than that, but it was the most he could get away with, without retribution.

***** opened his eyes, the warm fuzzy light beaming through his window. Falling onto his face, nearly blinding him when he moved. He sat up, the slightly itchy sheep wool felt blanket falling off his chest. What in the Depths happened, why did he just wake up? Did he black out again? No, that isn't right, he couldn't feel a headache.

It could've been you had. Yeah, probably. But Kulo'i going to Be annoying to deal with today. ***** got up, went to breakfast, actually saw his dad today. He was usually out earlier than either he or his mom woke up since he was an Elder council member's second. But today he was free. They all had a brief talk. Ate in silence. Then ***** got up a rushed to class.

OOO

***** sat on the flattened grass, resting for a couple of minutes as the rest of the class caught up to him. A small cloud of dust in the distance. He was wondering how to prep for the Weather Fall festival, this would be his first time participating in the Black Spear sects tournament. He'd gotten first place three festivals in a row, even when they bumped him up to the highest division last year. But the Leviathan Kin tournament was filled with cheap bloods, the Black Spear wouldn't. And they're much, much bigger.

***** heard the thumping of feet coming up the hill. He stood up, wiping off any dirt on the back of his pants. He didn't want anybody to think he was a slack, even the cheap bloods would talk. And by the droves, the rest of the trainees come up the hill.

The crowd of people kept at least ten or so feet of space from him in a circle. Like he was diseased or something. When ever walked around they parted around him, filling in the space behind him. The Depths? Wait did Kulo'i do this because I didn't go to his stupid little party? Oh, that bastard.

***** looked around, seeing the blond hair of Kulo'i that was slowly turning green. He made sure to try and sneak up on him, but out of nowhere, Kulo'i looked directly at him. Whipping around so fast that ***** wondered if he gave himself whiplash, but it was weird. How did he know ***** was right there like he was just told that. But he didn't see anybody talking to him when he did, so how?

Gah that didn't matter. ***** lunged at him, Kulo'i taking two steps but failing to get out of his reach. And ***** grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Blazing storms, what you tell them you little squid." ***** told him, putting a threatening edge into his voice so that he knew that he wasn't going to take this stupid little stunt lying down.

"Get off you crazy bastard!" Kulo'i yelled, seemingly panicked. No. Scared for some reason. And he seemed to start sweating again, trembling a little around the hands.

"Don't you try to get me with this act," He said, but he'd seen Kulo'i act. This wasn't it.

"G-get off!" Kulo'i pushed ***** arm, dashing away faster than ***** had ever seen him run.

He thought of pursuing him, but he looked around. Everybody was staring at him, eyes wide. Some of them looked like they were about to scream, or even throw up.

And when he even looked in anybody's direction, they stood a trembling step back. Kulo'i couldn't people to do this, and ***** realized something. He had gone to that party,

must've. That was the only place he could've done something that everybody here saw. But what? What in all the Depths, Sky, and Storms had happened for people to react like this?

OOO

***** stood in front of the old warehouse. The lone sun reaper setting over the ocean, its purple light glinting off the cold waves of the forever abyssal Leviathan sea. The taste of rotting seaweed on his tongue, the festering smell of fish and mildew emanating from the large warehouse just beyond the sand of the sea at low tide.

The intertidal rocks in impossible burbling shapes. Thousands of pockmarks covered it like the surface had turned into sea foam, then solidified when the bubbles popped. Making coves of slimy slick aliens, letting fish die as the tide left them to their ends.

The bitter wind bit into ***** skin, easily bypassing the thin black and white summer clothes. For it was the wind of winter waiting at the edge of summer, waiting to pounce. The building was fifteen feet tall, the base of it a foundation of stone weathered unfairly by time. Infested in green slime from the ocean it stood against. The rest was made of bone-white wood, the surface uneven, like the surface of rippling water. But the lines of grain standing out, expanded, leaving pitch-black cracks in the wood.

No one knew how old the warehouse was, at the bare minimum, it was 40 Leviathan Falls old by the oldest Elders account. She said she could remember that thing since she was a little girl, and even her grandfather told her about how it was there even when he was a child. However, that must've been a lie since he was the first generation to inhabit Ma Kai'emo, meaning the great fisher's home.

***** step close to the door. It hung off the single bottom hinge, the top right corner broken off years before. The wood around that broken piece was blackened and green like the stones. He summoned his Spirit Avatar, a completely solid dark blue staff with silver accents. ***** opened the door.

Inside was a sprawling cavern of a building that looked too big from what the outside said it should be. The earthen floor scattered with blue flowers, or were they purple? If he looked at them directly they looked blue, but in the corner of his vision, he could swear they were purple. Scattered alongside them were kegs of booze and all sorts of belongings, ranging from sweaters and robes to even jewelry. Like people just stopped whatever they were doing and left the building, along with what they were holding.

And it was dark, like a mouth about to swallow him up. Even the cracks in the roof only got a few feet before they got eaten. ***** summoned a ball of Leviathan Tracker mana, the path meant for people with natural perception or movement mana, both of which he had. The Sacred Pear technique, a swirling ball of blue like it was plucked from the ocean that had roiling silver swirling inside it, with a thin opaque film around it.

***** walked forward, the light from the door dimming, till it was gone. Then the light from the ceiling cracks faded. Leaving him only in a small sphere of light, only knowing the directions up and down because of the floor. And he only knew the floor was there because it was scattered with so many things that he would trip if he didn't. And then the sound was starting to get swallowed too.

Footsteps nor his breath that escaped from his lips. The only sound was the blood rushing in his ears and the wind in his chest. And it was so cold, not the true cold that was winter. No, the wrong cold that meant there was nothing in the air. His breath did not fog the air, nor did he shiver. The surrounding space was ice and frost incarnated into its abomination of a form.

Then there was music, a lullaby sung in three tongues. One a melodic lilt, one a chanting fervor, one a scathing rasp. They whispered but were screams in the cold nothingness that was but wasn't silence. The voices rose and rose, to murmurs then truly spoken. No matter what direction ***** walked, even if he was sure he turned around. It kept on getting louder.

Then a flute joined the choir, played by a madman. Every note played right, but when joined with the second it turned into a scream though it should've sounded like honey. And he could get the noise to quiet down, it just kept getting louder and louder, beyond a fevered pitch, beyond a scream, beyond what can be thought by a sane mind.

Then ***** light hit something. Two feet, positioned like a body laying on their stomach. Inching forward he saw a person, praying. Their throat was torn open, vocal cords ripped out, but still singing their part. Putting the light forward ***** saw two more people, faces he recognized as trainees.

Circled a musician's stage made of old boxes abandoned here centuries ago. And on it was him, from hair to teeth, tinged a lilac purple. Naked, sitting on a chair, playing the flute with endless breath. Then it stopped but the flute did not. Opening its eyes that was everything.

They're the ocean, the wind that made waves, and the waves themselves. The gold and the earth that cradled it. The sky, the stars, the dust we all come from and become. No, they were

not everything, the eyes showed what it wanted. And that was everything, but now. Now it wanted him.

***** opened his mouth to speak even though he knew he couldn't, but the thing beat him to the punch anyway, "I am you. Well, I have taken parts of you. But that's still you, so I am you, aren't we? You may have noticed some of them, your name, and days among them. Kai'emo 'The Great Fisher', named after your home, true?"

***** shot the Hollowed Pearled at it, giving it as much power as he could. And the thing caught it. Examined it, then stretched its mouth out. Flesh contorting, jaw dislocating, and breaking. Bone and blood failed to pop or rip or squelch or tear or drop or flow and fall as the torso-sized ball slid down its throat.

***** could feel them become him. Soul ripping away into his gullet. Not painful, or burning, but wrong. Violating every part of their being down to their hollowed-out core. Then Kai'emo was back to normal, staring at *****, as they froze.

"We are equally we now, I will give you everything, for I will have everything soon. Even though I have most things. I will offer you more and more, you just have to become me. For now, we are each other's shadows. Only you can change that."