

He stood up from his white chair - an almost ivory throne, like a collection of bones picked clean of flesh by Jyykle vultures - and revealed his chest wound. It was exposed in all its blackened crimson glory within the tear in his tunic: a vast, open rift in fabric, gray ripped away from more vibrant hues. While it had clotted, it had not scabbed, and perhaps it never would, in the confines of Oblivion or whatever the afterlife was called. As he presented it, he smiled thinly, palely, his teeth as radiant as a perpetually waning moon.

Ronovi said nothing to him at first. It wasn't that she couldn't say anything, or that she didn't want to say anything. The silence just felt appropriate at this point in time. It almost *smelled* sweet, like soft ambrosia or citrus - mildly floral, pleasing to the nostrils. Not like the rank odor the woman had experienced as she toppled back from her stool on the *Ascendancy*. The odor of death, the odor of regret - like bad breath, or soiled trousers. So long ago.

How long ago was it now?

She watched her brother from afar, almost admiring the mark she had left on him. Her sapphire blade had disappeared nimbly into the flesh - buried five inches, around the sternum. More than enough to puncture the heart and exit out the back. He now stared at her with entirely black eyes; the shaved head he had retained after becoming a hired mercenary was still prominent, the dark stubble glistening from both his scalp and his jawline. His eyebrows appeared permanently arched, and as Ronovi approached him in the endless space of white, he didn't let his grin drop off his face.

"Long time, no see, sis."

His words echoed in the chamber. Ronovi blinked, then sighed. She let a gloved hand dance across her clammy forehead.

"I didn't think..."

"Didn't think what?" Yaske asked. He folded his hands in front of him. His caved in armor hung limply from his muscular frame.

Ronovi chuckled. She raised her hands toward the man in a pseudo-apologetic gesture. "I didn't think it was like this."

Yaske reciprocated the laugh. He turned to face the chair he had been perched on, though already it appeared gray and weary from being abandoned. He let the knuckles creak and pop on both hands. Then, he was the one to step toward Ronovi, dark tunnels glistening above his tear ducts.

"It's...something, I guess," he remarked. "A bit boring, but I have company sometimes. Mom and Dad visit me, when they can. Sarit, too."

“Does she have to carry her head under her arm?”

“Normally, I’d strangle you for that,” replied Yaske. “But it won’t do much, where we are, now, will it?”

Ronovi nodded. Her feet shuffled about until they were shoulder-width apart, as if she were taking an offensive stance. It had been so long since she had beheaded her own sister - so long since she had murdered Yaske in their duel - so long since she had been responsible for the demise of her entire bloodline. Now she stood in front of the animated corpse (spirit? demon?) of her dead brother. And he wasn’t angry. He wasn’t screaming, crying, attempting to hit her. They were just two people stuck in limbo now, in stasis. Waiting for their souls to be sucked dry.

She remembered the poison hitting her tongue, spilling from her whiskey flask. Tra’an’s masked face - the word, “treason.” Perhaps she had truly gotten what she deserved.

“So,” she murmured. “Am I here with you now, then?”

Yaske shook his head. “No,” he uttered. “Not yet, anyway. You still have time.”

“Time to what?”

Ronovi’s brother’s smile grew wider. “Time to try something new.”

Then, it was as if the wind had been pulled from the Epicanthix’s body and redirected into her gut like a sucker punch. Ronovi stumbled back, breathing haggardly, then yelped as she felt the sensation of skin being stretched over dry bone. Yaske returned to his throne then, sitting down and staring upward into the eternal sky. The open wound in his chest mocked Ronovi. Red spider web. Black abyss. Red and black spider web abyss.

The white enveloped her then. And Yaske, to her chagrin, laughed.