

Steam hissed from the lidded pot upon the gasser. It curled and furled angrily before being sucked into the compartimized fan above. The mechanical *click, click, click* of another burner was mixed with a rushing *fsssh!* Blue- green flame spurred to life from combusted gas licked beneath a wide, low-brimmed pan and the oil within it. Dark tan hands took up a broad knife and maneuvered several vegetables, feeding them into the chopping blade. *Thump, thump, thump...* One stray slice slipped from the board, following to the ground and rolling in a large sporadic circle before being nabbed by a long, white and gold tuggle. Iarna scampered off to circle her young red faced two-legged charge with her catch, squeaking. Twice the size of the Ryn-Zeltron child, the lanky beast barreled her over eventually to which Shay'Ira sat herself up with a giggle and started a game of chase — around the small living room, the island and back.

Zujenia glanced over her shoulder towards the pair, broken temporarily from her thoughts. Normally, she would chastise them both, reminding Shay not to rile the family pet or play in the kitchen, *especially* when mam's cooking. But today she just watched, taking in the moment with a pained warmth, love and longing to protect that constricted her chest. She bit her lip hard and returned her attention to the counter before her, hands gripping the edge as she leaned into it, her white locks falling to cover her face.

*Socora Erinós...*

The half-Ryn had faced the Brotherhood purge, fought in their wars, defended Arcona from gangs, traitors, and monstrous creatures. And despite all that she had thought she could try to have a family. That together with her love and only, with Kordath, that they could carve a safe haven for that dream. Hell, they had even been gifted a solution to conceive their own children, to bring Shay a sibling to cherish with them.

But then the Socorran, the Human woman with one icy blue eye and grey streaked raven tresses returned from her coma induced slumber. It would be unfair of her to lay complete and utter blame upon Socorra for her state of disrest, fear, dread. She was a mere speck settling on the hovering mass of catastrophic and tragic debris waiting to break atmosphere and blot out three suns and whomever already walked on her nightmare planet, those she cared for. The Arconan had made it clear to Zujenia that she would remove anyone who she felt threatened the Clan. She wasn't necessarily speaking about treason. This was the old Arcona from before the half-Ryn. If a weak link was detected that risked the clan as a whole. Destroy it. Especially an inept Arconae.

Kord didn't see the problem here.

They argued about it when she found out he hired Socorra for the Assistant Director of the Dajorra Intelligence Agency. An agency he currently headed. An Arconae many of past times would consider as a coward, and looked with disdain upon. An individual who should never have received such a prestigious title and best to make disappear.

*Sizz, sizz, sizzle!*

Droplets of oil angrily splashed and leapt throughout the pan as the chopped vegetables slid into the heated pan. Golden eyes blinked, she hadn't realized she had moved, cutting board in hand and autopiloting cooking. Zujenia stared at the gasser. After a few heartbeats she realized the steaming sauce pot's burner had gone out. Her hand moved to relit it. *Click...*

*Click...*

*Click...*

And some part in the back of her brain flipped.

She had to protect her family and there was only one way...

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"Luvs! Imma home!" The door slid close as Kordath walked in, depositing his jacket and bag at the door, turning just in time to catch their five year old daughter careening towards him.

"Papaaa!!!!"

Zujenia smiled and met them both, bending slightly to exchange their routine evening kiss once Shar was shifted to his hip. It was deeper, held longer than their normal peck.

"Mmm, there a special occasion I forgots about?" He asked, white mustache pulled up by his smirk and under lowered grey eyes.

"No special occasion. I just love you," she explained, giving a warm loving smile before flicking his thigh with her sandy tail lightly. "Well, that and I have to walk Iarna. Dinner's almost done, be back in a bit."

"It smells pretty good—" was the last she heard as the half-Ryn exited the apartment and made her way out of the complex building.

In five minutes, Kord will have his evening cig to destress.

And in five minutes, a large bang could be heard as the gas that had filled the apartment ignited...