

## Cold night

“Why are we out here?”, he asked while rubbing his gloved hands together. We continued to walk along the snow infested garden.

“It’s a surprise.” I answered quietly as I moved my lantern around, checking for any followers.

“It’s too cold for a surprise-” He tilted his head back to sneeze. I lunged forward in an attempt to muffle his sound but nothing came out.

I sighed in relief. “Impatience is never rewarded.”

He stopped moving and crossed his arms, “I don’t care. It’s too cold to be patient. Unless you tell me where we’re going then I’m going back.”

“We’re too far out for you to start heading back. Especially alone.” I responded as I turned towards him, losing my patience with every snowdrop that fell.

The snow fell lightly but enough to represent my impatience. The crunch sounds faded out as we both stared at each other. The wind blew lightly as I raised the lantern to get a good look on his face. His frown was deep and his scowl was fixed. I rolled my eyes, walking towards him. He took a step back causing me to pause mid step.

“Come on, Elias. You’re too old for this kind of behaviour.” I held my hand on my hip.

He rolled his eyes, mocking my face from earlier, as he gradually backed away some more.

“Elias.” I spoke with a warning tone. He took a small step back before dashing off. I yelled out for him and dashed after him.

“He can’t be serious...” I groaned. I swished around with my lantern, yelling his name various times. I walked forward; no longer finding myself on soft grounding. It became hard and wet. Water dripped from above me, trickling onto my fur coat, my curled hair and freezing dark face. It wasn’t pleasant. I marched further into the cave, cautiously swaying the lantern around.

The further I ventured, the more confused I became. I would yell out periodically only to be met with laughter, then muffled screams. I dashed around. At times feeling like I made progress and other times feeling hopeless. I prayed to the constellations and ran some more.

At some point I took a break. Within my heavy pants, I heard, “Your incompetence killed him.” I raised my head really quickly and looked around. The voice...was mine. It was hoarse but still recognizable. It had an angry and pained tone. It seemed distant and closed off in its anger. Something that didn’t sit right with me.

I continued the pursuit—I called out. The same laughter echoed through but the once muffled screams grew louder. I dashed quickly to the sound—I raised my lantern; leading me to find a familiar silhouette. I rushed over and touched his shoulder. He felt cold.

Fear took over and I turned him around. His eyes lacked focus. His dark skin was unnaturally pale. He fell over and I dropped the lantern to catch him. As it fell, it illuminated his stomach region. It was empty. No skin. No organs. Black. Tattered. Decayed.

I screamed at him to wake up. No response. I begged. No response.

“It’s your fault.” My focus shifted quickly to the voice from before. A dark silhouette stood before me and my deceased brother. I held his body really closely. She squatted down, staying in front of us at a fair distance. “Your inconsiderate nature killed him. Are you proud?” It asked cruelly.

I stared at what seemed to be myself. Her face was unrecognisable, way too dark to decipher. But it felt familiar. Like a part of me that had been buried for too long.

I tried to speak to her but nothing came out.

She walked closer to me and knelt beside me. “You should be ashamed of waking up each morning.”

She suddenly lunged for my throat and I woke up, sweating profusely. My eyes darted around the room. I sat up quickly in the bed and unconsciously reached for my neck. I paused midway and only stared into the darkness. The cold air was my only comfort for the rest of the night.