

## Interlude – Nayra II

Nayra watched as the group led by her sister left the city, her eyes following it all the way until they entered the forest and could no longer be seen. Only then did she relax, letting out a big breath that held all her worries and fears. She almost convinced herself that Reyla had agreed to her wish as a ruse, so that she could ambush and drag Nayra back with force. But they made their goodbyes, and Reyla didn't try to convince her to come back. She hadn't really believed it to be true until just now. For the first time in her life, she had asked for something, had made her feelings and wishes known, and she got what she wanted.

Her sister left, and Nayra was still in Ven'oran. Alone, save for a few staff members and Ento. But they were members of the Orders, and Nayra... she no longer was. She asked to stay, but that act meant more to her than just refusing to go back. She didn't know if even Reyla understood completely, but Nayra wanted to be free of her family, of the Orders and their plans for war. To make her own choices, something that she never had a chance to do before. Everything was planned out for her, and she had been expected to follow the road decided on by others.

And now she was free, and that terrified her. Because she didn't know how to make her own decisions, not when it mattered. She glanced at the blinking notification in the corner of her eye, the testament to that fact. Three choices of a perk that would define her class, decide how her class was going to grow. All of her choices so far had been in preparation of taking one of the three perks she had offered. To create synergy and make her a Classer that had a good balance of offensive, defensive, and supporting perks. Her abilities were less costly to use, and she had enough stamina reserves to use them as often as her cooldowns allowed.

It was why **True Classer** perk was so important for most of the top tier combat-ability oriented builds. Nayra's Class was a legendary one, meaning that the abilities she got to choose from were all top tier, and they would only improve with further evolutions. Having the **True Classer** perk would let her utilize the most out of her class. But her Class wasn't something that was known, it wasn't something that had been studied. Her class allowed

her for some unique choices, but the people that had been in charge of her build rarely allowed Nayra and Reyla to pick any of the unique choices. The only unique choice they had ever been allowed to pick was their first perk, the **Valkyrie's Descent**.

All of the other perks had been things that were well known, instead of the unknown and unique perks that her class offered. Nayra understood that somewhat, she knew that there were perks which weren't good, or at least ones that required a couple other perks to really shine. Nayra knew that Reyla was thankful that she had people to tell her what the most optimal choice was, but Nayra had grown resentful towards her family for removing her personal choice. It was her power, it should be her choice. Like what her parents had done, what Ryun had done. Rankers, people who had to make their choices blind, and who somehow gain incredible power.

Seeing how powerful he had gotten, it lit a spark inside of her. She wanted what he had, to be able to do what you wanted because you were powerful enough not to care about others. The problem was how she was going to get there. She was free, but that meant that she could no longer rely on the resources of the Order and her family, not that her family had ever showered her with resources as some of the other families did. All that she had, she had earned on her own. She had been trained and instructed by some of the best that her family had, but she had never been given powerful items or free Essence.

But all of her training, the build she had been instructed to follow, the Order and her family. All of these things stifled her. She didn't feel like she was growing or improving. And seeing Reyla overcome her was the thing that pushed her over the edge. She wanted a power that she could call her own. Even if she got help along the way, she didn't want it to be an instruction coming from people that didn't even have a legendary Class like she did.

She was alone now. And that meant that she would need to find a source of Essence on her own if she was going to survive. The compound was supplied well enough by the sect, so she wouldn't starve, but she really didn't want to stay there anymore. The staff and Ento were all giving her strange looks. Her decision to stay had raised some questions, but none of them were brave enough to ask, so instead they stared.

Nayra turned around and walked back, through the city. She had made her choice and now she needed to make the first step. She already had a vague idea of what she wanted to do, a plan or something like it. She just wasn't sure if she could go through with it. Telling Reyla had been one thing, but going to the Sect Head was something entirely different. She wasn't even sure if he was going to hear her out. He knew that they had kept the truth that they were not just a Mercenary Guild from everyone. But, she couldn't help but feel like he would be receptive to what she had to say. Not because they flirted a bit, or because he particularly liked her. Something inside told Nayra that they were similar, that both of them just wanted to get stronger. She believed that that had to count for something.

Before she realized she found herself at the gate of the main compound of the city. The Sect Lord's home. According to Ento's information, the Sect Head didn't really spend much time in there, he certainly didn't sleep in the main bedroom. That had led them to believe that the man had to have a fairly high endurance stat. Nayra knew that people that had a high endurance could stay awake for much longer than ordinary people. Ento hadn't been able to learn much about the new Sect Head, mostly because he wasn't interacting much with the servant groups that Ento had his people in. He was an enigma both to the Order and to his own people.

At the gate, she was met by two guards, warriors of the Twilight Melody Sect, but still wearing the colors and the uniforms of the old one. She wondered why they hadn't changed them yet, but that wasn't why she was there.

"I want to see your Sect Head," Nayra said. She was fairly known by the guards by now, or rather Reyla was.

The guards hesitated in answering, but then they whispered something to one another, and one entered through the gate and ran off, probably to see if the Sect Head wants to see her. Nayra waited anxiously, trying to figure out exactly what she was going to say. She knew what she wanted, but she was never good at words. Reyla had always been the one who knew what to say and when to say it.

The guard returned and she was allowed in, one of the guards leading her through the compound. She frowned as they didn't head toward the main

building, but rather a smaller one that was nestled at the end of the large yard. The guard led her inside what appeared to be a small training hall, and then pointed toward the doors at the end leading behind the building.

Nayra scowled as the guard left her there. Her being allowed to meet with a Sect Head alone was not expected. Most of what she learned told her that sects were big on perceived power, and rules that she didn't quite understand.

She exited the building and stepped into a small garden. Immediately she noticed Ryun, sitting on the ground with his head tilted to the side. She wasn't sure if he was aware of her presence, but remembering all that he had done, she figured that he must know. She didn't announce herself, but instead waited.

A few minutes later, he sighed, stood up, and started walking toward her. "Skills are all... so annoying to grasp, aren't they?" The Sect Head asked.

Nayra was startled by the question, but then quickly answered. "Most consider them the hardest way to gaining power."

"They might be, but they are far too useful to ignore," he shook his head, then faced her. "I thought that your group left this morning?" The Sect Head, Ryun Nacht asked. She realized just how much she had been relying on seeing someone's eyes in order to read them. When she looked at Ryun she saw nothing of his true thoughts.

"They did, I chose to stay," Nayra said.

"Oh really? May I ask why? Please tell me that they didn't leave you as a spy, given the assignment to seduce all my secrets out of me?"

Nayra blinked, her mouth opening to quickly deny it, but then she realized that he was joking. She composed herself and spoke. "No, I decided to stay on my own. Because... I don't feel like I belong back home anymore."

Ryun tilted his head at her. "You coming here and telling me that, means that there is something that I can do to help I assume?"

Nayra opened her mouth, and then closed it. She wondered how people went about these kind of things. Then she started to second guess herself. She didn't really know this man, a few conversations exchanged didn't make people close friends. And yet... she did feel a kind of kinship with him. Because he had what she wanted.

“I want to be strong, to be like you,” Nayra said finally.

“Ah... Did you hope that I would take pity on you? I have heard that people here sometimes seek out great sect masters, that they try to get them to take them in as students. That they might share secrets and Essence Crystals with them. Raising them up to power. Is that what you want?”

“No!” Nayra said quickly, shaking her head. “I don’t want pity or charity. I can work and earn for myself. But... I would like guidance and advice.”

“Hm... Ever since I arrived here, all I’ve seen is people guarding their secrets vehemently. Why would I share with you my advice?”

“I... I have some skill at the spear, I can help your sect, teach others how to fight better,” Nayra said. She had spent a lot of time thinking about what she could offer. She knew that the former Sect Head was apparently a good spear user, but she knew that there was no way that he had the time to teach those who were just starting their paths. And the things she had learned came from the best her family had to offer. Her Skill tier might not be reflecting that, but it was only because she hadn’t improved upon that which she had learned. What she had been taught was the culmination of many different styles, it wasn’t easy to improve.

“That does sound interesting,” Ryun said slowly, his hand scratching at his chin. “I had been thinking about making some changes in the way the sect’s people were trained.”

Nayra’s heart started beating faster. Getting a Ranker to give her advice, someone who knew what it was like to be free and make your own choices, would be exactly what she needed now.

“Ah, but in what capacity would you teach them?” Ryun asked. “Are you still a part of your faction? I would not want your loyalties to be split... perhaps if you would be willing to make a contract and join the sect officially?”

Nayra had expected that, she knew that someone like Ryun would never help her get stronger if she wasn’t a part of his sect. “I am no longer with them... They might not like that, and send people to... retrieve me. But I don’t want to be with them anymore. I am willing to join your sect, but I cannot reveal anything about my previous faction.”

“Understandable,” Ryun nodded. “So, what is it that you really want from me?”

“I would like your help in choosing the best perks for myself, not something that is thought of as the best pick for a build. But something that would make me powerful.”

“I do not know much about Classers, you understand that. Unless you would want to become a real Cultivator?”

Nayra was tempted, but her Path wasn't powerful, it was her Class that she felt could make her far stronger than what the build others had made for her would do. “I don't need your knowledge, I need your instincts. The thing that made you pick your choice and allowed you to survive your old world. The thing that makes you a Ranker.”

“I can do that, but you do know that you will need to show me all of your screens if you want me to give you the best possible advice I can?”

“I know,” Nayra said. She knew that in the sects, screens were the closest guarded secrets, it was similar in the Great Empire, although not to that extent. But it was still a private affair, showing someone your screens made you naked before them. It gave away all your secrets.

But Nayra wanted to gain more power far more than she wanted to keep her secrets. She looked at Ryun, he had shared with her things about himself that most wouldn't. The fact that he was from the Seventh Iteration among them.

“If you are willing to make a contract with me,” Nayra said. “I am willing to do whatever it takes.”

She would get more power, no matter what price she had to pay.