Pay the Price

Context: Taking place after the Exo Stranger first enlists the Guardian to destroy the Black Heart on Venus, in Destiny 1. The Guardian, Orion, and his loyal Ghost, now discuss taking up the Exo Stranger's request.

"It could change everything."

Ghost's words rang hollow in Orion's head. He tossed and turned them around, not once considering going through with it. Destroying the Black Heart would be, to put it lightly, a great undertaking.

"Don't tell me you actually listened to that crazy Exo." Orion grunted, marching back toward his ship.

"How couldn't I? She gave us an option to potentially, as we understand it, destroy the Darkness. In case you forgot, that's the enemy of the Traveler."

"I know what it is." Orion snapped. He activated his ships transmat systems once in range, teleporting him and Ghost inside.

"We don't even know if it *can* be killed. Ever asked that?" He sighed, gripping his ship's steering. He could see his knuckles turning white from the strain.

"Well, she seemed pretty confident. No harm in trying."

"Remember what happened last time I tried to help someone?" He jutted a finger to his scarred left eye.

"Thalnok remembers."

Ghost didn't try to persuade him after that. A part of Orion wanted to listen, but at the same time, another part of him couldn't let go of his fallen fireteam. A fireteam he took responsibility for.

And Orion knew that without a fireteam, he wouldn't have a chance at destroying the Black Heart.

As Orion's ship left Venus' atmosphere, he set coordinates for the Last City. He had picked up a few engrams while he was away, and he knew Master Rahool would be more than happy to decrypt them.

They rode together in silence. Orion knew that Ghost wanted to convince him, and maybe Orion wanted him to…but he couldn't lose another fireteam. Not after the Disaster.

Soon enough, the familiar sight of the Tower entered his vision. He flew into the hangar, docking his ship, and waved a polite 'hello' to Ms. Holliday.

Entering the Courtyard, he spotted Rahool, furiously writing away on his notepad. Rahool didn't look up as Orion approached.

"Master Rahool. I have some engrams I think you'd like to have a look at."

"Ah, Orion!" Rahool exclaimed, finally looking up.

"Good to see you. Please, hand them over. I've been itching to decrypt something all day." Rahool reached out both hands as Orion dumped the engrams into his waiting embrace.

"Come to papa." Rahool muttered as he began the process. While Orion waited, he had a look around the Courtyard. Taking note of the Guardians and Tower workers, diligently going about their business and conversing with their friends.

Orion sighed.

Friends. He hated what that word reminded him of.

As he continued glancing around, he spotted what looked to be a Guardian slumped on the ground, leaning against a wall with their head in their hands. They seemed to be weeping.

"Rahool, I'll be right back." Orion said, making his way over to the Guardian. Rahool muttered something dismissively, but Orion was already next to the Guardian. He took a cautious seat next to them. If the Guardian noticed his presence, he didn't give any sign of it.

"Excuse me." Orion said. The Guardian didn't respond, but they stopped crying.

"You look like you need a…friend." Orion tilted his head.

"What happened?"

The Guardian lifted their head, wiping away their tears. It was a young man, probably in his mid twenties. His black hair was disheveled, and a noticeably fresh scar went across his face.

"My Ghost…he…" The boy stammered, fighting back more tears. Orion nodded solemnly, understanding completely.

"I see. Did it just happen?" He asked. The boy nodded, gesturing to the hangar.

"I barely got my ship and myself back in one piece. I tried to take on a Hive wizard on my own. I…I thought I could handle it. But it was…it was too strong. And my Ghost…" He trailed off, his lip quivering.

Orion put a supportive hand on the boy's shoulder.

"It…wasn't your fault, kid."

"But…my Ghost…he'd still be alive if it wasn't for me! And I'd still have my Light…"

"Your Ghost knew what he was getting into. You did, too. Being a Guardian, protecting the Last City…it has a cost." As Orion said this, he realized how…badly he needed to hear his own words. He stared at the boy, realizing…he saw himself. A scared boy taking the blame for something out of his control. He stood up, a little taller than before, and extended a hand to the boy. The boy took it, standing back up.

"What's your name, kid?"

"A-Arlo."

"Arlo. Go to the Vanguard war table and find Commander Zavala. He'll advise you on what to do next."

"Okay. I…I will." Arlo stammered, wiping his eyes once more. Orion nodded, directed the boy to the war table, and began walking to the hangar.

"Orion! I've decrypted your engrams!" Rahool called after him. Orion waved him off.

"Give whatever was inside to someone who needs it! I've got somewhere to be."

"Orion, where are we going?" Ghost asked, confused.

"Back to Venus. We've got a heart to kill."