

<== Intermission (II) - Meet

"I need you all to save the world." said Melody.

There was a long, uncomfortable silence, before Gabrielle finally broke it.

"I think you're going to have to give us a little more than that."

Melody nodded, blowing air through her lips in a failed attempt to whistle.

"Okay... any one of you could save the world. If I wasn't here doing this, one or two of you would survive long enough to become legends. You'd save the world from the return of a god."

"As much as I like the part where more than two of us live." said Azira dryly. "That sounds like we'd be doing just fine."

"Well yes, absolutely." Melody nodded, half a smile crossing her face. "Then the rest of the gods would come back. I've seen what happens to Eyal if they win. You've seen demons, right? And horrors? This becomes a second home for them. And unless you have a fondness for lava baths, that's not gonna work well for us. The burnt forest is *nothing* compared to how Eyal looks if you fail. I've seen so many futures that I've lost count of them. I've asked whether I can save the world with everyone from you," she said, nodding to the pale redhead sat next to Azira.

"Through to the twins who tried to bring back the first god. It didn't work. Myssil couldn't do it, Linaniil couldn't do it. I even tried the Master of Dreadfell. But no. The only way I could find that would save the world is with *all* of you. Fuck knows why."

"I hope you don't expect us to work with her."

The sarcastic comment came from Calliope, who, of course, was staring venomously at Natasha.

"Well, yeah. I do." Melody shrugged. "If 'not killing her' counts as working with her, I mean. You don't have to be friends. And it'd be nice if she'd stop doing horrible things for the sake of power, in exchange for your kind 'not killing her'."

"Question then." the young psion said brightly, gazing malevolently at the aloof expression of the mage in question. "Does the world end if she dies *after*?"

"...not that I know of." Melody admitted, scratching her head in discomfort.

"Then I can wait." she smiled maliciously. "Miss Inquisitor?"

Gabrielle hesitated, but she didn't have a real choice.

"Fine." she muttered. It tasted like bile on her tongue.

Melody gave a relieved smile. "That's great. Well, I think you all know each other, or at least there are enough links that you can ask around."

"There is one person I don't think anyone knows." said a woman with rainbow eyes, half lidded as she stared across the table at a girl with brown hair. "No-one's met her."

"Actually, not true." Melody said, brightly.

"Everyone's met her."

The girl looked at Melody in distaste, before turning to Irescia and dipping her head.

“My name is Jenna. I am sorry for the deception, but it was necessary. The Wardens must watch if we are to protect.”

Her voice was quiet, but assured.

Five people tried to ask her questions, but Melody’s voice rose above them.

“Okay, girls, please. We’re running out of time.”

“How can *you* possibly be running out of time?” Leah looked up at her, having been talking in a low voice to Serena.

“Look.” said Melody, in a bracing tone of voice that came across as fairly condescending. “Do you know how many rules of spacetime we’re breaking here?”

“...no?”

“Yeah, well *neither do I*. I lost count after a hundred and fifty.” she said, dramatically.

“It’s ninety four.” said Jenna bluntly. “And we’re bending three more.”

“Be that. As it may.” said Melody, glaring. “We got as many heroes together as we could, and we’re keeping you as long as we can, but we can only stretch reality so far before it snaps. I happened to bring some early solstice gifts for the bunch of you, but I can do that *after* breaking spacetime over my knee.”

“I’m doing all the work.” muttered Jenna.

“Except these.” continued Melody, choosing now to ignore her assistant. “You all need to see these.”

From the air, she pulled a small bag. Then with an air of gravity, she pulled a pair of mindstars from within. One shone a volatile swirl of pink and red, casting its light throughout the fortress. The other radiated a sickly green light.

Now, more than any time before, there was a deathly silence.

“Even the world knows that we’re in too much danger to stand divided.” Melody said, quietly, walking down the table towards Rose, who stared in disbelief.

“Eyal’s Hope.” the warden said, laying down the brightly coloured gemstone before the girl, letting the arcane power play around it.

“And Eyal’s Fear.”

The second mindstar followed, corrupted energy clouding the crystalline surface without rhyme or reason. Slowly, Rose reached forward, taking them into her hands, and breathing out. Blades of energy emerged from them, dark grey, but tinted with the volatile, leaping pinks on one blade and the muted, bile green on the other.

As Rose stared at the weapons, Melody turned to Bell, sat several seats down and staring at Rose in amazement. She took a short few strides, then drew from the bag a staff that could not have fit within, a long shaft of emerald green, topped with the symbolic magenta of magic.

“Eyal’s Trust.” she said, simply, and held it out. Bell took it, gripping the warm weapon tightly, as if afraid it would vanish.

Melody smiled.

“Good luck.”

Time and space snapped back into place.

[==> Empty Smiles](#)