

Axana was now walking in a plain covered with white flowers everywhere the eye could land on. Some cherry blossom petals were flying in front of her before being carried away by the soft wind of the day. The wind made the pink flowers rustle as she kept walking straight ahead, the sound was faint, almost forgettable around her. It felt like even the wind didn't dare bother what was preparing.

The sound of the clinging chain around her neck snapped her out of her daydreaming. She was surrounded by other alicorns, some she knew and others she did not but whatever the relationship between her and her weird cortege, she wished she could avoid the stares. Anger, despair, amusement in anticipation, disappointment. All of them were different and each one weighed on her like a mountain. She closed her eyes, trying to catch some snippets of conversation in a hope of escaping the eyes of everyone. She heard two faint voices.

"It's been so long, old friend. How is your daughter doing ? Aqasha was her name right ?" came the sweet voice of a female alicorn a few meters behind her.

A male one answered "Indeed, long time no see, and she is doing fine, thank you. She can just be quite..." he paused and let out a chuckle before finishing his sentence "stubborn at times."

"My." came back the mare's voice "I thought you adopted her, but she sounds just like her father." Both exchanged a discreet laugh as they carried on with their conversation.

Axana reopened her eyes and wanted to turn her head to see the two talking, but a yank from the guard holding her shackles pulled on her heavy imprisonment collar and prevented her from doing so. They didn't restrain her wings nor her hooves but they didn't need to, she intended to behave. The situation wouldn't allow otherwise anyway.

The group finally stopped in the middle of a little clearing. The alicorns started to move away from Axana as the guard ordered her to stay put. He approached her to remove her chain from the iron collar around her blue neck. It would have been so easy to pierce his chest and try to fly away as fast as possible. She looked at him and he returned her gaze with disdain and disgust.

Axana remembered that he was here at the time in the room when the judge in front of her exclaimed : "Axana. You are this present day found guilty of the murder of Ryodayu, the Ardenian. According to our laws, the jury, after deliberation, has condemned you to the death penalty. By the law of our country, you can claim amnesty in a duel with our Queen Luxoah..." the memory faded from Axana's mind as she realized the guard was speaking to her "... by hitting her only once. You don't need to actually kill your opponent but be aware our Majesty will not hold back to take your life in regards to your crimes."

With a last hateful glare, the guard turned away to join the now fully formed circle of Alicorns around the clearing, his wings rustling against his scale armor where a small imperfection stood just above the heart, invisible to most untrained eyes and Axana's Sapphire Rank insignia at his belt. They took it away at the trial's end, she'll never need it ever again, even if she won today. All were watching with various and mixed expressions in silence.

Axana materialized her personal katana at her eyes level. She could see her green eyes reflecting on the weapon. She knew she had to hit her opponent only once but doubt and a hint of fear were haunting her mind. She was going against none other than one of the Queens of Equestera, did she really have a chance ?

She shook her head. It was only a single cut, she was a master at arms, and a good one at that, sword fighting was up her alley. She swung her sword assuming a battle stance for the duel to come as a tall figure then made her way through the crowd. Every alicorn kneeled before her. There was no mistaking who she was.

As the newcomer approached Axana, she realized she was standing in front of one of the Queens of the continent. The two pairs of wings was the obvious hint but also the glowing halo just above her head. She was wearing an obsidian black kimono contrasting with her perfectly white mane and coat that made the white of the flowers on the ground look dull. At her belt was what seemed to be a pommel and sheathe of masterwork designs. Something triggered in Axana's mind and body, she swallowed with difficulty and her grip on her weapon weakened.

She remembered her mother's stories she used to be told as a filly of the great regents, watching over them for hundreds of cycles already. Gods among alicorns. But today, she realized that the stories and actually having one of the Divine rulers mere meters away from you with your life on the line were different experiences hundreds of light years apart from each other.

Looking at Her was like looking at the sun, but in this case, she felt compelled to bow her head down to this second day star. She didn't, however, as she knew better not to be inappropriate in this situation. Her eyes focused when she realized she was fixing the void. She swallowed a second time and was greeted with the sight of Luxoah smiling at her.

Actually smiling. Not some kind of psychopathic smile someone would put to show their utter delight of ending a life as she experienced in the past, but an actual warming and sincere smile. Axana couldn't feel the slightest hint of animosity or even hatred from the Regal Alicorn. She was looking at her in a way she never would have expected.

Some part of her felt reassured for a moment before fear took hold and became absolute terror, her sword actually started to tremble. "A single cut, you only need a single cut." she frantically kept repeating to herself. Axana pointed the tip of her katana towards her opponent and lunged forward.

She instantly got blinded by a ray of light piercing her eye. It was coming from Luxoah's blade but she couldn't discern the source properly. How did she get her weapon out so fast and without even the slightest sound ? Even the most well cared for and oiled katana would make a barely audible noise that she learned to listen to for years. And why was she now upside down ? What kind of strategy was that ?

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The wind stopped, leaving the place in an unsettling silence as Axana's head touched the ground, separated from her collapsing and lifeless body. Her blood was turning the perfectly white flowers to a crimson color where she once stood. Luxoah sheathed her weapon of light before turning away.

