<== Intermission (II) - Break

Calliope's fingers drummed impatiently against the surface of her ancient voratun glove, as she smiled at the wrongfooted protector. This was taking far too long.
"So… one of your shadows told you that the murderer is at tempest peak. And so... you want to go and kill her?"
"Something like that." Calliope said, brightly. Torimel rubbed her temples, not meeting her gaze.
"Look. I don't… I don't trust your ghosts to be working in our favour. Why the hell you never told anyone you could bring them back,"
"You didn't ask."
"Why the fuck would I know to ask? I don't trust them anymore."
"They're the same things they always were. You're just uncomfortable thinking about it."

Torimel's glare was pure venom. The cursed girl was sitting in the chair before her desk, feet not quite reaching the ground, swinging back and forth like she was bored at school. The same half-vacant smile she always wore was on her face, and her eyes wandered curiously about the room. On the edge of the protector's perception, she felt the *odd* blinking of the shadows, bending reality to move from place to place, somehow less hateful than when a living mage did it.

She made up for her lack of instinctive hatred with an added dose of the conscious kind.
"Anyway, it's not really about them." the girl added, airily. "It's me you don't trust."
"Are we doing this now?" The protector raised an eyebrow as she spoke, not really asking. It was almost relieving; she hadn't been sure that Calliope had even noticed how much she disliked her. It was good to know she paid attention.

"You're right. I don't trust you. I don't understand what you are, who you are, why you do anything. If I send you to do something, I don't know that a hundred people won't die on the way because you got bored. I don't trust you because there is nothing about you that can be trusted. I don't know why Myssil let you do as you wanted, but it ends now."
"You don't understand anything." Calliope agreed. Her expression didn't change at all, and Torimel wanted to scream at her. "No-one tries to understand me because I act crazy. I get that. But I have stuff to do and it's important that it be done. I've not killed anyone but a mage, an' if you have problems with me killing them you have the wrong job."
"You disrespectful little-"
"That's not disrespect." Calliope shook her head, and the smile finally faded. She met the protector's eyes now, and Torimel found herself wishing the girl hadn't chosen now to take things seriously. "This is disrespectful. I've been here longer than you. I was here when Myssil became protector, and she was doing better than you. All you've done is get angry about some lunatics going too far, and run a holding pattern of the same things we've always done. Everyone knows the only reason you're protector is because the liberal ziguranth were pinning their hopes on Azira for next choice, an' she left because everyone was getting extreme. Not that the extremes are happy with you, they think you should invade Angolwen or somethin'. So

let me try it again. I'm gonna go to Tempest Peak and find Natasha for the Inquisitor. You're either gonna say you sent me, or you're gonna say I ignored what you said, like I am. I don't really care. I don't think you can stop me."

She stood up. Torimel took a breath to catch herself.
"That does explain something, at least." she said, trying to regain a little bit of power by playing it casual. "You're not crazy."

Calliope paused, and looked back. The smile returned to her face, and for once it reached her eyes.
"I'm not crazy. But people don't get in my way when they think I am."

She left the room, and Torimel was alone with her thoughts. It didn't last very long.
"Do you want me to follow her?" asked Irescia from the doorway, one eyebrow raised in mild curiosity.
"...the polite thing to do would be to pretend you didn't hear any of it."

Torimel sat heavily back into her seat. Irescia blinked.
"I'm sorry." she said. She didn't sound it. "Would you like me to pretend that now?"
"No, you've missed your opportunity." Torimel said, heavy with irritation.
"Then do you want me to follow her?"
"No. I need as many of my good people around as I can get, Irescia. That includes you."
"Should I send one of the bad people?"
"What, and watch her kill them? No. She's right, at least about that. This is a fucking mess." she said, rage twisting in impotent fury, and a healthy dose of worry. Irescia just watched passively, not sure what was expected, and very much regretted not leaving when she found it out.
"...do you think she was right?" the protector asked.
"...about being stronger than us?"
"About me being a bad leader. I *know* she's stronger than us."

Irescia held that question in her head for a moment, and considered it. Then she considered the idea of fuelling her body with lightning and leaving the room and the city before Torimel could make her answer.

"I think you haven't caused any problems." she said, finally. Even as she did, she knew it wasn't the right move, and regretted shelving her second plan.
"You agree with her." Torimel said, dully. "Fine. I get it. I should be more like Myssil and Azira. Or maybe I should go the other way and start backing the hunting patrols. It's only fucking fair, right?"
"I am sorry." Irescia spoke automatically, and Torimel sighed.
"I don't know what I expected from you." the Protector muttered. "Everything people think about us being dragon-crazed lunatics, it… look, you're not even offended by that."

“Should I be?”
“Forget it. You can go.” she waved her hand, turning to look at the wall.

She stared for a good minute, before she turned around, her scowl more pronounced than ever.
“Did you *want* something, Irescia?”
“Dragons.” she said, bluntly. “They’re the ideal elemental creatures. The things mages are mocking when they call fire.”
“Yeah, I’ve read the academia.” Torimel snapped. “Pure expressions of Eyal’s will, up there with slimes. Are you going somewhere with this?”
“I went to the mountains yesterday.”
“Good to know you’re spending your time constructively. Did you miss napping on gold?”
For once Irescia ignored the ribbing.
“I went to ask the dragons what they think of magic. No-one ever has.”

Torimel looked up at her as if she was crazy.

No. That doesn’t quite cover the exhausted, long suffering expression of utter resignation that Torimel gave to the wyrmic, who proceeded to ignore it.
“They told me that they didn’t really have an opinion. Sometimes they make friends, if its a mage of their own type.”
“You’re joking.”
“Dragons don’t joke.”
“Dragons joke all the time, you’re the one who doesn’t. Please to Eyal tell me you just missed a joke, Irescia. I don’t need this.”
“I didn’t miss a joke. They don’t see what the difference is.”
“Okay. So.” Torimel slammed her fist onto the desk, and it creaked unhappily. “To conclude what we’ve learnt today. Calliope could quite literally kill us all, and with Myssil gone no-one knows if she will. I’m an empty figurehead who only got the position because no-one hates me enough to stop me and I don’t have the initiative to cause my own problems. And last but not fucking least, either dragons are the most inattentive creatures in Eyal, or there’s a flaw in the entire foundation of our philosophy. Have I summed it up correctly?”
“Calliope won’t kill us all.” Irescia said quietly.
“That’s the part you’re gonna object to?”
“And you got the position because no-one hates you and everyone trusts you. You don’t stand for the extremists or the redeemers. You are for the Ziguranth first and last. What you decide the city would have decided, if you gave us six months to take votes, form committees, and argue about specifics.”

Torimel unclasped her fist, which was red where she’d struck the hard wood.
“Myssil trusted you too, didn’t she.” the Protector said, lowly.
“She told me I was too predictable to be untrustworthy.” Irescia said simply.
“She wasn’t wrong.” said Torimel, heavily. “...I wish you hadn’t told me any of this. I really do. But… thank you, I guess.”

“I do try.” the wyrmic said, with only a trace of modesty or of sarcasm.
“It shows. Occasionally. Do you think you can find out anymore?”
“I can go and ask more wyrms. It might just have been the broods I asked.”
“I hope so. Go.”

Irescia nodded, and turned at last to leave, before pausing.
“I believe Perenna’s at the door. And agitated.”
“...those aren’t words I wanted to hear.” she groaned, before calling to the woman. “Perenna?”
The door opened with speed, and the Sentinel moved in with an uncharacteristic look of fury.
Torimel stood up, hand on her desk.
“What happened?” she said, voice stronger than before.
“Myssil’s mausoleum. Someone broke into it. Her body and armour are gone.”

The desk broke.

==> Midnight Sun