

Geneva sat alone in an empty field in the Perilunal Planes, staring aimlessly into the endless flatlands. Dots of light from the settlements in the area decorated his view, and the soft light of the moons draped around him gently, invigorating him with energy. He had a growing tendency of visiting here every time his mind began to wander. It was hard to believe it's been a month since Envoi ran away from home.

The calm scene did little to soothe his mind that raced with brooding thoughts of regret and guilt. His thoughts went back to the day of Envoi's moonpyre cleansing. All his belongings from that day were to be burned. It was a no-brainer, his gear was soaked through and through with corruption to the point that it was no longer salvageable. This type of thing happens all the time when you're a knight, yet when it happened to Envoi, there was something about it that rubbed him the wrong way. Envoi was still bedbound when everything happened. They weren't even there to witness the ceremony.

It was embarrassing to admit, but Geneva had snuck one of Envoi's things out of the heap of their corrupted gear: their moonsoath *ferronnière*, a magical moon-shaped gem attached to a silver cord that was worn over the head. A moonsoath *ferronnière* was nothing to scoff at, and this one was especially important since it was handed down to Envoi from their father, the head of the Tzavaras house. His younger sibling always carried it around with them as a good luck charm. Even though a majority of Envoi's things were completely coated with corruption, the little piece of jewelry was tucked away in their bag and had been completely untouched by any residue. It was a miracle. By all means it was safe to touch and wear. If he had left the fate of the headband up to the other knights, it would've been scorched to a crisp along with everything else, or moons forbid, stolen. The thought of one of Envoi's treasures being discarded so mindlessly was distressing to Geneva, so he snatched it while no one was looking. Shame burned under Geneva's skin after he did it. He knew it was a major breach of conduct, not to mention dangerous, but any good captain knows the importance of rule breaking sometimes. Though he didn't know how to justify himself if he were caught. He was planning on returning it to Envoi, but it was never the right time. His little brother seldom wanted to be near him ever since the incident, and for the most part Geneva respected that wish.

“Must be lonely being all by yourself, may I join you?”

He jumped. The dialogue completely interrupted Geneva's train of thought. Whoever had come to bother him was directly next to him. How did he not notice this presence until just now? Geneva stared at the foreigner. Moonlight had applied a silvery coat on his guest's dark pelt. In the darkness, he could make out their striking slit white pupils. No matter the setting, those eyes were completely unreadable. Zero emotions betrayed the newcomer who Geneva identified as Augustus, one of the recent additions to the introductory knight roster. Ah, Augustus is a dark elemental, no wonder Geneva couldn't sense him sneaking up on him. After a long awkward silence with prolonged eye contact, Geneva managed to mutter “sure,” and turned back to staring at nothingness.

Augustus frowned, glancing at him with uncertainty before settling himself down next to the captain, looking at him inquisitively. Geneva shifted uncomfortably under his watchful eyes, suddenly wishing he turned him away instead. Augustus's presence was not welcomed

here tonight, and he could tell that his new companion had questions. However, it was a little too late and much too rude to send him off right after he just sat down.

There was little known about Augustus, at least, to Geneva. He was a friendly xyn, a star-born that came from a desert dimension, which immediately attracted the attention of many curious Lunestrians who've never been outside of Lunerest's borders. He arrived in Moonreach asking for help finding his missing younger sister who ran off right after his family arrived in Lunerest. Her name is Cecilia. Geneva made sure to remember that name thoroughly if he ever found her, like how he'd hoped others would do with Envoi's name if they ever found them.

The pair sat in silence for a couple of minutes with nothing but the sound of soft breeze between them. It didn't take long for Augustus's curiosity to win out. "I've seen you coming here a lot," he began. Geneva's throat tightened as Augustus continued talking. "Other knights tell me not to worry about it, but..." Augustus paused when he looked up at Geneva and noticed his furrowed brow and unfriendly countenance. Catching onto the captain's mood, the dark moxyn's eyes softened as he dropped his voice down to a whisper, taking on a gentle tone before continuing. "But why do you keep coming here?"

Gaze shifting to the side, Geneva lowered his head and looked away from Augustus, feeling his anger beginning to rise. It wasn't Augustus's fault. Letting out a grunt, he forced himself to loosen his tense body and let go of anger before answering.

"This is where my brother was corrupted," he replied solemnly. Augustus's eyes widened a little, surprised, perhaps.

"Ah, I see," he murmured, diverting his eyes from Geneva and looking down. "I'm sorry."

Geneva tightened his lips before managing to choke out, "it's fine. He made it out fine." He could still picture Envoi's crumpled body covered in corruption mist and residue, lying motionless, their face unrecognizable. Never in Geneva's life had he thought they looked so... small.

Both xyns kept vigil like this for quite a while. Occasional glances would be made in Geneva's direction, but Augustus gave him his space, assuming the role of guard as Geneva continued to look off into the distance with a grave expression, lost in his own world of grief. Eventually, Geneva would stand up and start making his way back to Moonreach, with Augustus following only a few steps behind.

"Don't tell anyone we were here," Geneva announced.

"Why not?"

The captain halted, "I... I'm not sure."

He stopped, thinking of what to say. "I don't want xyns to think I'm still... grieving." His voice lacked its usual stability and certainty. Another awkward silence passed between them before Augustus padded in front of Geneva and looked him in the eyes as he spoke. "We all know you're still grieving. No one blames you for it." Geneva stared at Augustus with doubt as the other xyn continued to speak. "I haven't been here for long, but being a captain means a lot of xyns are relying on you, right? How can you protect anyone if you're so hung up on an accident that wasn't even your fault?"

Geneva rolled his eyes, his true feelings beginning to slip through his suppressed emotions. The other knight kept talking. "I'm not saying that you should get over it, but your

reaction is a bit dramatic, don't you think? Your brother is corrupted, not dead. They're still alive. We both need to keep fighting to make sure they don't get hurt while they're gone."

He could feel himself getting antsy and agitated as words escaped his mouth before he could stop it. "This is so much more than corruption, Augustus. I don't think you understand the weight of what has happened to him. Envoi will never be the same again."

"But *you* have a duty as captain to not let that get in the way of your job. One slipup because you can't stay focused could mean another xyn getting corrupted because of your selfishness." Despite Augustus's steady and neutral voice, his ears were starting to draw back.

Geneva scowled. Augustus didn't stop. "I'm worried sick too, okay? Cecilia is out there somewhere all by herself right now, and every time we fight a corruption beast, I think of her, defenseless and scared. I'm scared to death that she's going to get corrupted out there. I fight corruption beasts to protect her. I fight harder knowing that with every beast slain she's a little safer. If you really want to protect your brother, you'll fight even harder for him. You cannot give into these flippant feelings with all due respect, captain."

Geneva scoffed, shaking his head. He was at a loss for words. The gall on this xyn! "Did you come here to mock me? My feelings are none of your business, Augustus," he replied, his voice rising.

"Your feelings have everything to do with my business," Augustus yelled, ears pressed flat against his head. "You are the one I answer to, you are the one that leads me into battle. If you can't make sound decisions, you put my life at risk!"

A surge of guilt washed over Geneva once he said those words. When he puts it like that—there isn't much he can argue with. Whether Geneva liked it or not, Augustus had a point. Was his recent performance visibly lacking because of his grief? He sure hoped not. Even with this revelation, Geneva was unable to swallow his frustration with the other knight. He was worried of saying something he couldn't take back.

Augustus stared expectantly at Geneva, waiting for him to bite back. All Geneva could do was give a shake of his head and storm off. There was too much to think about, and his emotions were too out of control right now. By the time he cooled down and returned to the spot where he and Augustus argued, the dark moxyn had already left.

The next day while walking through the halls of the knights' headquarters, he'd catch a glimpse of his combatant from the previous night. Augustus was chatting to a few of his peers, laughing. When their eyes locked, Augustus frowned and quickly looked away, excusing himself from the group. It was only a matter of time until they came face-to-face again. After all, Geneva was the captain that overlooked Augustus's squadron. But for now, he was completely fine with this distance between them. They both needed some time before they were on good terms again.

Geneva thought a lot about their conversation from that night. As days passed, he dwelled on it longer and longer. Eyeing Augustus from across rooms and fields, wondering if he should talk to him. It surprised Geneva that he longed to talk to him again. Augustus had been completely out of line. Despite Geneva being a stranger and also his superior at work, he was completely comfortable with disregarding niceties around Geneva. Even though his

harsh words stung, nothing he said was wrong, and he felt no ill will against him for saying what he did. In fact, it was quite eye-opening to hear someone disapprove of him for once. Ever since Envoi ran away, many xyns were sympathetic to Geneva. A few family members and fellow knights cried alongside him. But no one had told him that his sorrow was disruptive, or moons forbid, dangerous. Being a captain came with heavy responsibility to protect and lead, and Augustus, despite not fully understanding these roles, was right to call him out for his behavior. If it wasn't for Augustus, he didn't know if anyone else would've brought this to his attention. Augustus... the name rang through his head. What a peculiar xyn you are. He wanted to speak to him again.

Without thinking, Geneva approached Augustus several days after their argument. Usually he was surrounded by company who were all enthusiastic to learn more about a star-born, but today Augustus happened to be alone in the armory. Geneva was unable to get him out of his mind, he *needed* to talk to him. Augustus pretended not to notice Geneva when he approached him, but didn't run off when it became impossible to ignore him. Geneva stared him down, suddenly everything he wanted to say wouldn't come out. Augustus who was wiping down a wooden training sword scooted away from Geneva uncomfortably.

"Uh, what can I do for you, captain...?" Augustus said, breaking the silence but still refusing to make eye contact with him. The words were awkward and insecure.

"I've been thinking a lot about what you told me the other night."

"You...you have?" He finally looked up at Geneva.

"Yes, I have. And you're right. I am putting you and everyone else at risk the longer this goes on."

"Well, I'm glad you took it into consideration. I hope I didn't offend you," Augustus replied, his shoulders relaxing.

Geneva nodded. "You were completely out of line with how you spoke." Augustus looked away, embarrassed. "Eheh... sorry about that. I didn't mean to be insensitive, honest."

"I know. No one has ever spoken to me like that before. I think I needed to hear the truth the most from you, not anyone else. You've stirred something in me."

Augustus chuckled, "what does that mean?"

Eyes softening at Augustus loosening up, Geneva smiled. "It means you've changed me. I don't know in what way, but I want to know more about you, I want to talk to you more. I feel like you have a lot of wisdom to share."