

## Terminal

The sole survivor stood from her kneeling position over the body of her most recent patient, looking at the translucent sheath of red covering her hands and arms, dripping down her legs, streaming down her cheek from a long gash along her hairline. She wasn't even sure what of all that blood belonged to her, or how many people it belonged to for that matter.

Taking in a long breath, finally savoring the air she hadn't had time to breathe in the heat of battle, she allowed her heavy sword to fall to the ground.

Images of her fallen comrades suddenly filled her mind; she winced, and pressed the heel of her hand to her forehead, trying to shunt the images away. She had been made a promise all those years ago by her best friend, when they were no more than children hungry for strength. He promised that when he returned, their long lost friend would be in tow, that he would drag him back, "*Even if it costs me my own life...*" if only it would dry her tears. Back then she had been too stupid, too naïve, too impaired by her girlish tunnel vision to realize that *he* was her best friend, and not the raven haired avenger with obsidian eyes that could see through every thought with the flick of a blood-red glare. The one who had abandoned the only home he ever knew, all for vengeance.

She forced herself to return to the present world, the smell of blood and death and betrayal filling her senses. She was afraid to open her eyes, to turn around and look out over the field riddled with defeated bodies. But it wasn't the bodies that frightened her the most. It was the tall, raven haired avenger from her past, whom she could feel standing on a rock opposite the small stream splitting the field. She could imagine his cold black eyes turned a frightening shade of scarlet, boring into her back, waiting for her to turn and fall into the endless days of suffering that awaited her if she made contact with his gaze.

"Are you afraid?" his voice floated to her, so much older and barely recognizable when drowned in all that condensed hatred. It nearly caused her to lose her balance...

But she kept it, even straightening more than she thought possible with the large slice through her side which was only half healed. A wound that had been acquired nearly a year in the past, but had been reopened by the fearsome strike of the enemy while she had been healing one of the fallen men from her village. She had been distracted by the

fact she was nearly out of her power that allowed so many to live. There had been so much blood and injuries within only that first hour...

Once again she had to pull herself back, this time, managing to open her eyes.

“Afraid?” she asked in an amused yet barely audible tone. “Hardly.” Her voice had been depleted too...*all that yelling and screaming at them not to die on her...* For a split second, she thought he hadn't heard her, but the startling gust of bitter cold air and the sudden presence behind her told her otherwise.

His mouth was right next to her ear, sending violent vibrations down her spine with every breath.

“Are you sure?”

She suppressed the urge to scoff. “I'll never fear you.”

Only the complete and utter truth would suit him. She took in another deep breath, allowing old memories to appear before her eyes. Before he had left, betrayed them all, they had been the unstoppable team of rising stars. Completing every mission with success, training every day for the next one, and still that wasn't enough for him. He left in the moonlight, never to return to the home that held so much misery for him. *After all, it was the place where his entire family was massacred...* Her conscience laughed at that. They had **all** had their misery. They had **all** lost something irreplaceable, and yet **they** were the weak ones in his eyes. They were weak for staying with their friends, near their homes, to gain power through support and hard work. He was the strong avenger. He had to leave them to grow more powerful and get his revenge.

A strange twisting in her stomach alerted her yet again to the present. Maybe it was the blood loss that kept allowing her mind to stray like this...

She could *feel* him smirk behind her.

“What is there to fear?” she spoke again, her voice softer, near the tone of affection she had had for him all those years ago. “Suffering? Death?” she laughed out loud, despite the pain it sent ripping through her abdomen. “I've experienced worse things.”

“Hn.” *‘Is that so?’*

His voice had a foreign tone, riddled with an emotion she couldn't name, for his voice had always been emotionless to her.

"I guess revenge can never be sweet enough, can it?" she asked.

It was her turn to smirk wearily at his silence. A fuzzy cloud was consuming her, obstructing her vision, eating away at the balance she had built up out of pure adrenaline. Since she had seen him again she had forgotten about the numerous cuts and openings in her flesh, losing track of her own blood.

She brushed her fingers along the fabric of her clothes, leaving behind streaks of red. It was the red that proved her alive while coursing through her veins, and proved her many friends and patients dead while silently spilling on the ground. It was red like his eyes. Eyes that had once protected her, and then criticized her, now tormented her.

"I'm sorry." His voice was no more than a low whisper.

Turning swiftly, she managed to startle him, gazing bravely into those very eyes that were now wide in surprise. Something in their crimson depths startled her as well, the most visible trace of sorrow and remorse she had ever seen. His irises softened on her, fading into their natural onyx hue. She had waited so long to hear those two words from him. There were nights when she thought she'd give anything to hear them. How ironic, that it wouldn't be until this moment, when she could feel her life slipping away from her ever-so-slowly, that she finally would. But keeping her gaze even with his, allowing a small, sad smile to grace her battered features, she accepted his apology without words.

She had always known this day would come, though maybe not so soon, nor in this place, certainly not with her long lost teammate standing in front of her. But she accepted this grim fate as her knees hit the ground, the rest of her not too far behind. She could hardly hear his voice, so distant now, calling her. It wouldn't be so bad, she decided. After all, life is terminal, simply an existence during the short time before death. At least she has made something of it, achieved at least one of her goals, bringing him home. It was there that she died, battered and beaten like those around her, a true warrior, right at the feet of the man who had once called her useless in battle.

