

## Decisions

The moon turned into the sun as Ryun kept his eyes to the sky. The Essence of light changed slightly as the transformation of the moon into the sun took place. The base of it was still what Ryun identified as Light Essence, but its color tint differed. One was Moonlight, the other Sunlight. He wondered what the difference was, since there obviously had to be at least one. The intensity of the light was also, surprisingly, the same, but the difference between the light at night and during the day was probably responsible for how it illuminated everything.

It didn't matter to Ryun at all now, with his eyes he would never again know darkness. All was revealed to his eyes. He had adapted to this vision enough that the myriad of colors passing through each other and meshing together didn't bother him. Though it was still hard to see sometimes when a lot of things were happening at the same time. He wondered sometimes how he was seeing in the first place. Light did bounce off everything around him and hit his eyes, but he saw even in the dark. He didn't *see* in the traditional sense; it was more like his eyes were a kind of sensor that just... detected all Essence in front of them. It was, ultimately unimportant, at least for now. In the future, perhaps he would dedicate time to trying to understand his eyesight fully. For now, he had other goals to pursue.

He plopped a small crystal filled with Void in his mouth and swallowed it, filling his sustenance core as he pondered on what to do. He had cycled in the Void as much as he could and he had some Void crystals that he had purchased over the years, enough perhaps to advance to the next realm. He had gone after all the Void Essence crystals that he could find over the years, stockpiling it so that he could cycle or just to use as sustenance in emergencies. He could advance, but... he would lose out on the full benefits of his core cycling. His core size was substantial now, he had enough Qi that he could stay in the fight a lot longer than he could three years ago. Skipping one single stage shouldn't impact him that much, he still had entire realms ahead of him to cycle and get more benefits. Though, it would be harder in the future, he would need more Essence. It was, as it always was, a matter of

benefits. Going into this fight while in the Evolved Realm would give him a lot more power, but staying his hand would increase his future gains.

Ryun was still weighing his options; on the one hand, he did want to be as strong as possible. On the other, he had to survive to become strong. In a perfect world, perhaps he would've been able to find a deep hole and spend a hundred years just cycling, contemplating his power, training, mastering it. In reality, all it would take was one mistake and he could die. His time in the Infinite Realm had him meeting a lot of different people, and most of them didn't have the luxury of waiting and trying to do things right. Some didn't have the knowledge; others didn't have the time or resources. They tried to grab as much power as they could in order to survive, to have a better life.

On Earth, education or practical knowledge usually meant a better life, in the Infinite Realm, it was all about power. Ryun had advanced and grabbed power on his own, he didn't follow in the paths of those before him. He was... alone from the start, on Earth he had no one who could teach him what to do, and in the Infinite Realm he had no one who he would really allow himself to follow. Not even Tali, whose advice he did value, he wouldn't follow her instructions and the way she grew to power. Not because he didn't think that the way she did things didn't work, but because he was carving his own path.

He needed to make a decision now, before they arrived to their destination. They were going into a place that was foreign to most of them, though that didn't bother Ryun. What he was worried about was Nayra and the people that took her. He intended to get her back, and the more power he had, the more leverage he had.

So many factors to consider, and he was still not close to making a decision. Still, he had some time yet, they weren't going to arrive for a few weeks more.

Ryun shook his head and pushed those thoughts away and turned to other matters. Most of his time on the ship he spent talking with Vryull, discussing mostly the Void and nature of the Infinite Realm. When he wasn't engaging with him, he tried to focus on his own personal understanding of the Void and improving his skills, or rather his **|Mental Fortitude|** skill. It,

aside from his **|Sword Art|**, was the only one of his skills that wasn't yet tier 5, which meant that it was the only one that he could improve.

He might not be willing to follow Tali's exact path, but her warnings about imbalance were valid. Still, trying to improve a mental defense skill without an opposing will or mental attacks was hard. He hadn't managed to improve the skill far because of it. Still, he didn't stop trying.

As he was focusing on his skill, his sense caught Selia and Erdania moving across the deck of the ship. They found a place near a railing at the bow of the ship, stopped to look over at the ocean and talk. Ryun tried not to listen in, but it was... difficult.

Thankfully the topics of their conversation weren't anything too private or important, they were just discussing the future of their mission. He had caught a few of their conversations in the past where they had spoken about him. Most of the time they use a privacy formation while in their quarters, but sometimes they either forget or think that they are safe. The relationship between the three of them hadn't progressed at all since their arrival to his sect. It was obvious that all three of them had other things to worry about, and Ryun was more than happy to push everything to a time when they didn't have such worries. But... the months spent on the ship alone had made him... longful.

Unlike most other people on the ship, Zacharia and his partner—Naha—didn't use privacy screens. From context, Ryun had learned that the ship's rooms were supposed to give some privacy, they prevented the sound from escaping. But that didn't shield from Ryun's sense. He *heard* every word that they spoke to one another. He knew what they talked about him. It didn't bother him, most of it was true. What had struck him was something else.

The... familiarity, the bond between the two of them. Zach had someone in whom he had complete trust, who trusted him in return. They... loved one another, were partners in all things. It... reminded Ryun of the past, of what he wanted in life. Seeing him with someone like that hurt more than any words that Zach might say to him.

It was what pushed his thoughts back to Selia and Erdania. In truth, Ryun knew why he was stalling, why he hadn't done anything. He was unsure

if anything could come from what they wanted. He had barely been able to deal with one woman in his life, and they were so much different than Melody was. Selia wasn't even human, she was a demasi, a Sect Leader, a ruler. She was powerful and she carried herself with a dignity, with pride. She was confident in herself and what she could achieve. Erdania was human, but descended from another Iteration. That didn't really bother Ryun, but she was... a lot. When he had met her before she was loud, boastful, feisty in a way. She lived her life and didn't care what others thought about it. It was what had drawn him to her in the first place, since he was in some way the same.

He wasn't loud, at least not initially, but he too didn't care much of what others thought. But since they had boarded this ship, he hadn't seen much of their personalities. They were keeping themselves separate. There were many reasons why they could be doing that, but Ryun was pretty sure that it was the result of what had happened to their Sect. They had lost, suffered defeat, and that had marked them. Ryun knew something about that and how it felt.

Finally, he sighed and stood up, then made his way over to them.

"Ryun," Selia greeted him with a raised eyebrow as he came over. In her posture he could tell that she was surprised that he had approached them, the accompanying emotions coming through their bond just confirmed his suspicions.

Erdania glanced at him with a tilted head, her hands crossed over her chest.

Ryun leaned against the railing next to them with his back, his face turned to the other side of the ship and raised up so that he was looking at the sky. He thought for a few seconds, trying to figure out what he should say. He went through many scenarios, trying to figure out the best way to approach things. In the end he just shook his head.

"I am not good at this," he said at last.

Both of them blinked in surprise, exchanged looks then turned back to him.

"What do you mean?" Selia said.

“Approaching and talking with people,” Ryun said. “Not that I am unsure how to, or what to say. It isn’t that. It is that I usually don’t need anything from anyone, and if I do, I just say directly. But with the two of you it is different, there is an expectation of... something to happen.”

Ryun paused, letting them interject if they wanted. Both of them remained quiet, so he continued.

“We’ve agreed to get to know each other, but you’ve not tried to talk with me in that manner at all, why is that?” Ryun asked.

The two of them exchanged looks and then Selia brought out a privacy screen and activated it.

“After we approached you, when you told us that, we’ve had a talk,” Erdania said. “You were right, we should have given things more time. That is what we were trying to do, give you time and space to think about everything.”

Ryun glanced turned his head to glance at them as he realized that he had kept his eyes on the sky. He didn’t need to look at someone to see them, but he knew that most would consider things like that rude or at least abnormal. They were both looking at him, their expressions guarded. That was... not good in his opinion, not if they wanted to build something between them.

Ryun thought about the situation, knowing that for anything real to happen they needed to know each other and that meant more than what they knew now. Through the bond with Selia he could feel her emotions, she respected him, liked him even, and there were other... darker emotions that she was trying to control. Ryun could tell that she was trying to reassure herself, so he let his part of the bond loose. He knew how to shield himself better than she did, but there wasn’t really anything to hide from her. He showed her everything.

He saw her eyes widen slightly when he did that. He knew that she would feel his respect for both of them, and the fact that both of them were attractive to him, in different ways. He knew Erdania in a different way than he knew Selia after all. With Erdania, their getting to know each other had been physical, they hadn’t talked much, and Ryun even now didn’t know much about her. She was physically attractive, though, Ryun didn’t

particularly care for that, physical beauty didn't mean much to him even before he lost his regular sight. But he did admire her for her freedom, doing what she wanted when she wanted.

Selia he knew better, they had talked, discussed advancement and even fought side by side. He respected her power and liked their conversations. But there was nothing more than that between the three of them. They had no intimacy.

"Ah," Selia said slowly. "I think that I understand."

"Understand what?" Erdania said slowly, looking between the two of them, sensing that something had happened.

It was obvious that she was uncomfortable with the bond, which wasn't surprising. The bond was always going to be something that they would need to deal with.

Ryun explained. "Our bond, I showed her how I feel. It was... my sentiments about you both. I've told you before, I like you, but greater... bond, requires more. So, I guess that we should start on that now. There are things that you should know about me before we proceed."

"Things like what?" Selia asked.

"About Earth, my life before the Framework arrived and everything that happened after," Ryun said, then he took a deep breath and started talking. Telling his life story.