

## Reclamation

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/17619224) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/17619224>.

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Rating:          | <a href="#">Mature</a>   |
| Archive Warning: | <a href="#">Major Character Death</a>  |
| Categories:      | <a href="#">F/M</a> , <a href="#">Multi</a>  |
| Fandom:          | <a href="#">Final Fantasy XIV</a>  |
| Relationships:   | <a href="#">Sidurgu Orl/Warrior of Light</a> , <a href="#">DRK family</a>  |
| Characters:      | <a href="#">Warrior(s) of Light</a> , <a href="#">Warrior of Light (Final Fantasy XIV)</a> , <a href="#">Estinien Wyrmblood</a> , <a href="#">Hydaelyn (Final Fantasy XIV)</a> , <a href="#">Original Characters</a> , <a href="#">Original Female Character(s)</a> , <a href="#">Garlean Empire</a> , <a href="#">Zenos yae Galvus</a> , <a href="#">Au Ra Characters (Final Fantasy XIV)</a> , <a href="#">Miqo'te Characters (Final Fantasy XIV)</a> , <a href="#">Personal Character</a> , <a href="#">Sidurgu Orl</a> , <a href="#">Rielle de Caulignont</a> , <a href="#">Fray Myste</a>   |
| Additional Tags: | <a href="#">Angst</a> , <a href="#">Angst and Hurt/Comfort</a> , <a href="#">Family Dynamics</a> , <a href="#">Sad</a> , <a href="#">Slow Burn</a> , <a href="#">did I mention slow burn</a> , <a href="#">very slow</a> , <a href="#">Eventual Happyish Ending</a> , <a href="#">Family Feels</a> , <a href="#">Emotional Hurt/Comfort</a> , <a href="#">some violence</a> , <a href="#">Eventual Fluff</a> , <a href="#">Eventual Relationships</a> , <a href="#">I love this dumb lizard boy</a> , <a href="#">4.5 Spoilers</a> , <a href="#">Final Fantasy XIV: Stormblood Spoilers</a> , <a href="#">Final Fantasy XIV: Heavensward Spoilers</a> , <a href="#">character exploration</a> , <a href="#">Canon character deaths</a> , <a href="#">Additional Tags to Be Added</a> |
| Language:        | English  |
| Stats:           | Published: 2019-02-01 Updated: 2020-09-07 Words: 41,681 Chapters: 15/?   |

# Reclamation

by [Yhcaep](#)

## Summary

SPOILERS FOR 4.5 and (eventually) DRK LVL 70 QUEST-YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED!  
After the events proceeding the Eorzean Alliance meeting, one Warrior of Light finds herself lost to guilt and remorse. What better time to abandon your duties, return to Ishagard and avoid your feelings and moral obligation to the world?  
Slow, SLOW burn, character exploration, angst. Sad stuff. Lots of feels. Rating updated to mature. Bad at summaries.

## Notes

Self-indulgent writing of my WoL and eventually the DRK family. Angsty sad stuff. Poor WoL is having a not-so-good-very-bad-day/week/year?  
Set up/intro is long, sorry!! Trying to get my writing legs back after a very long hiatus :^)

# Downfall

Everything was falling apart.

The fleeting peace brought to Ala Mhigo was shattered. Negotiations between the Eorzean Alliance and the Garlean Empire had failed miserably, bringing war and bloodshed back to the vast open plains and valleys of The Lochs. Her comrades, her *friends*, had willingly put themselves in danger once more to protect what they believed in- the freedom of their homelands, their people and their Warrior of Light. And still she had failed them when they needed her most.

Aunyx's eyes wandered to the blood that stained the desert sand, the liquid pooling together with the magitek fuel that leaked from the ruined machinery that now littered the battlefield. Scrunching her nose in disgust, her heightened sense of smell was overwhelmed by the stench of sweat, death and singed fur. She had narrowly avoided being crushed by a magitek gunship brought down by Ishgardian cannons, but the falling shrapnel from the airship had managed to tear one of her delicate furred ears. The bleeding had thankfully stopped, but the throbbing pain remained. Her entire body ached- it had been awhile since she had fought so fiercely and it showed as she tried to catch her breath, a film of sweat covering her bare shoulders. Though the battle had been won against the Garlean sisters, the victory had been short-lived at the return of the voice within Aunyx's head.

*"The Light...will expunge all life..."*

It was the same voice as before, but this time it was louder. Clearer. More urgent.

*"Only you...can forestall the calamity..."*

The words pierced through her mind, almost cutting her thoughts in two as she tried to remain conscious. Her vision blurred, the surrounding area almost blending entirely together in hues of gray and brown. The pain was much more intense than before, as if it was tearing her apart from the inside out. Using her spear to steady herself, she focused on the voice, trying to concentrate on the omen and its words. Why was this happening? What calamity was it speaking of? Why couldn't she snap out of this like she could when she experienced the echo?

*"Throw wide...the gates..."*

Aunyx's eyes couldn't focus through the head splitting pain, though she could vaguely see Alisaie's hand extending towards her. Their outreached fingers brushed briefly, before Alisaie began to fall forward, her eyes rolling back as she lost consciousness.

The voice finally began to fade, leaving a deafening ring in Aunyx's ears as she gasped for air. Trembling as she grasped her spear for balance, she could feel the tears in her eyes begin to wash over her flushed cheeks. Not again, not like this. She had already lost the few remaining Scions and countless other warriors of light to the unending slumber- and now Alisaie too.

“Alisaie...you can’t leave me too...” She breathlessly sputtered, beginning to lose the last grip she had on her waning composure.

“...I don’t want to be alone.”

With hooded eyes, she could make out the silhouettes of both Hien and Yugiri approaching her. They were talking, but she couldn’t make sense of what they were saying. It felt like the world was collapsing on her, darkening the edges of her vision until eventually fading to black.

-----

-----

“Have you ever considered using your gift for something a bit more...meaningful?” Alphinaud carefully began, treading cautiously in fear of offending the miqu’tte warrior that stood before him.

“You know, a cause for the greater good? A worthy campaign that would not only affect you, but would encompass all those of Eorzea?”

The young miqu’tte girl tilted her head, thoroughly contemplating the boy’s question. She was not much older than the elezen, and only a few inches taller. Her dark purple hair was neatly pulled out of her face in a loose braid, allowing Alphinaud to see her piercing violet eyes deep in thought. While Alphinaud wasn’t entirely sure of all the differences between the miqu’tte races, he knew for a fact that only Seekers of the sun had such unnerving pupils, slender and needle-like in shape. Her tail flicked back and forth, until she nodded to herself, cupping the side of her face with her hand. She flashed a smile at Alphinaud.

“Never really thought of it. Gridania is my home, it’s where I grew up. Not to mention the Lancer’s guild always has quests for me to do, the coin is decent. Why would I leave?”

“You’ve never thought about the world outside of the Black Shroud?”

“Of course I have. It’s not like I don’t want to travel, you know, see the world and all.” Aunyx hesitated. “I just don’t have the money, I doubt I’d get past Quarrymill before running out of coin. Gear isn’t cheap to repair, you know.”

Alphinaud frowned. Coin would not be a concern should the miqu’tte choose to assist the scions in their search for primals. She was gifted in the lance, that much was certain. He had observed her in menial tasks and quests assigned by the guild, and she had a knack for bobbing and weaving effortlessly in-between monsters and assailants. She was a force to be reckoned with, and it was clear to see why the lancer’s guild held her in such high regard despite her age.

“Your finesse with a lance is unprecedented, yes. But your talent lies elsewhere, from what the guild master has alluded. You have visions, manifestations of others pasts, I’ve been told. Don’t you think that ability could be used in a more, lucrative manner?”

She was clearly uncomfortable at the mention of her gift. All her life she was told by her parents that she just had an excitable imagination, something that was all in her head. As she got older, the visions became clearer and more frequent, enough that she had confided to her

guild master when it began to interfere with her trainings. He had promised to keep her gift a secret, though it seemed now that he had failed to keep that promise.

Alphinaud pressed on. “There are others like you, others who can see things far beyond this world. It’s nothing to be ashamed of, many liken it as blessing from Hydaelyn herself. Something that can be put to good use, to help those in need.”

This didn’t comfort the miqu’te, and it was clear that Alphinaud was poorly convincing her in joining the scion’s plight against the summoning of primals. If only Minfilia was here, he thought. She was much better equipped to answer the lancer’s questions and soothe her concerns about the exact goals and ambitions of the Scions of the Seventh Dawn.

“If I was to join this...grand quest you keep talking about, would I be able to return to Gridania when it’s finished?” The question abruptly interrupted Alphinaud’s thoughts, although it was welcomed as he was beginning to panic at the thought of potentially scaring off the lancer.

“That’s not a question I can answer, I’m afraid.” He meekly replied, shrugging. He continued. “If it means anything though, I know someone who can.”

# Guilt

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Waking suddenly from her sleep, Aunyx groaned as she ran a hand through her disheveled, now unbraided, hair. She could instantly feel cold sweat drops clinging to her forehead, probably covered in dirt from her last fight. All she could feel was pain- in her aching muscles and in her tightening chest. Everything hurt. Raising a hand to wipe her forehead, her eyes contracted to adjust to the room she had awoken in. There was enough sunlight filtering in through the windows that she could tell she was back in the Ala Mhigan Quarters, though she was completely lost on how much time had past since she had passed out. Rolling onto her stomach, she lifted herself up into a more comfortable sitting position, her lower body tangled in the thin bedding. She wrapped her tail closer to her body as she pulled her legs up to her chest, her lilac eyes dully blinking as she began to process what had occurred. Albeit slowly, she began to recount and remember the events that had unfolded during the advance against the Garleans.

And Alisaie. Her last standing companion that understood the trials and tribulations she had endured as a peacekeeper of the realm, now locked in a seamlessly endless sleep like the rest of her companions. And there was nothing within her powers that she could do to wake them. What kind of champion of Hydaelyn was she if she couldn't save those closest to her? Her chest continued to tighten, thinking of all the things she had failed to do as an adventurer. How had everything become unraveled so quickly? How could she let this happen?

Wrapped in her own guilt, Aunyx failed to hear the subsequent knock and door opening to her bedroom. Yugiri stood hesitantly in the doorframe, unsure if her approach would be welcomed or shunned. She decided to take a chance, considering the Warrior of Light was in no shape to refuse food and drink, at the very least.

"It's good to see you awake, Lyse and the others has been worried sick about you." Yugiri set the platter down on the tablet beside the bed, careful to not disturb Aunyx's few belongings. Pulling up a chair, Yugiri sat down, hands resting gently on her trousers. She frowned slightly, noticing the lack of rest in Aunyx's eyes. Although she had been asleep for days, she looked as if she hadn't slept in weeks. Was all the turmoil and fighting wearing on her so heavily? Or was this a side effect of the voice that had inflicted sleep upon the other scions?

"What happened, after I..." Aunyx began to trail off, her voice hoarse from lack of use. She was no stranger to passing out due to exhaustion, but this was something completely different.

"Lord Hien and I managed to get you and Alisaie back to the camp safety. You know, even dressed in armor, you are a lot lighter than we expected-" Yugiri recalled, before realizing this was not the time or place to be discussing the miqo'te's lithe figure. "Alisaie is with the others in the observation infirmary. I'm afraid that her state is similar to the others."

Aunyx nodded her head slowly, processing that Alisaie had succumbed to the effects of the voice just like the others had. Over and over again, She could only see the distressing expression Alisaie had worn before passing out etched in her mind. Alisaie had confided to Aunyx about her fears of the voice, and the concerns about what it meant for the others locked in their comatose state. Aunyx curled up even tighter than before, her fingers fidgeting with the sheets that barely covered her exposed legs and her tail wrapping around her ankle. All of a sudden she felt very small, as if her accomplishments meant nothing. She was alone now, no scions to stand beside her. Yugiri could feel the tension mounting, and attempted to change the subject to something more comfortable. Or, at least attempted to.

“You managed to escape the fight with few wounds, thankfully. Your ear is, however...” her eyes shifted to the miqo'te's ears. While one ear was in perfect condition, the other had suffered enough cartilage damage that a scar would be inevitable. Aunyx had managed to avoid more permanent damage and scarring through her countless battles, but it seems this time she was not as lucky.

Aunyx reactively moved a hand quickly to her ears, inspecting each with a delicate touch. When her fingers found the wound, she recoiled with a hiss. The injury was still fresh, and stung harshly at the slightest touch. She felt her face turn hot and red, suddenly growing angry. Cupping her face with her hands she attempted to hide her frustration.

“I'm so stupid.”

“Don't say things like that” Yugiri quickly grabbed Aunyx's hands, pulled them down with a gentle smile.

“Things don't always go the way we plan,” Yugiri started. “It's not your fault these things are happening- None of us could have predicted this. You're not infallible, so stop trying to be.”

“But i'm a Warrior of Light, that's exactly what i'm supposed to do.” Aunyx choked, her eyes brimming with anguish. Her pupils had dilated, filling her iris's with large dark circles instead of her usual slim pupils. “What other purpose do I have? This is all I know... all i've ever done. What purpose do I serve if can't even protect the ones closest to me- let alone others. I've failed the scions. I've failed the alliance. I don't know who else I can disappoint but i'm SURE there's someone out there who I haven't let down yet.”

“Last I check the alliance is not unhappy with you, From what I have heard from the alliance leaders, you've laid your life on the line countless times for them, just like you did for Lord Hien, and for Doma. Nobody thinks that you've failed them.”

“It doesn't feel like that.” Aunyx retorted. It was clear that her mind was set on this mindset, regardless of the action yugiri took. It would be best to move away from the subject entirely.

“I went ahead and picked up some fresh food from the kitchen, I would assume after your...ordeal, that you would be hungry. If there is anything you might additionally require, one must only ask.”

Yugiri took her leave, politely bowing before exiting the room. The air in the room grew stagnant and quiet once more, leaving Aunyx feeling even more uncomfortable than before.

Thankful that Yugiri had brought her food, she tore into the bread and meat left on her tableside bed. She hadn't realized how hungry she had been until Yugiri had mentioned it. Finishing her meal with impressive speed, she sat with her arm loosely hanging over her knee, contemplating what her next move would be. She could return to Mor Dhona and the Rising Stones, but it didn't feel anything like home without the others. However selfish, she didn't want to think about her friends. Not until she could find a way to bring them back from whatever realm their souls, their essence, had departed to. She couldn't return to Gridania, either- It had been years since she had spent more than a fleeting moment there, for fear of running into her parents. She had left them in the dark about her departure and adventures, to keep them safe from those who would use them against her. No, the Black Shroud was completely out of the question. Elsewhere she thought, such as the shores of Limsa Lominsa or possibly the endless deserts of Thanalan. None of those choices seemed welcoming or pleasant enough to her. She had the coin to travel across the Ruby Sea, but she never felt at home in the humid Yanxia forests. And the last time she had ventured onto the Azim Steppe she had once again been challenged by Sadu and her Dotharl brothers and sisters. No, she needed a place where she could blend in, hide from others. Disappear.

She chuckled dryly.

Well, there was once place she could go, where she could hide herself in layers of armor and cloth and nobody would be the wiser to who she was. Rummaging through her knapsack leaning against the bed frame, she pulled out a well worn map, one of the few belongings she had managed to take on most of her journeys. Gently unfolding the weather corners, she laid the map out on her bed, and gently traced her fingers along a familiar route. Her fingers stopped at a familiar crest, situated above an elaborate illustration of the City Ishgard. She weakly smiled.

"I hate the cold."

## Chapter End Notes

Get in losers, we're going to Ishgard next chapter.

DRK family incoming. Terrified to write Sidurgu and Rielle. Let's roll with it.

TY for reading, btw :3c



# Familiar

## Chapter Summary

Rielle and Sid time  
More world building

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Staring at the hunt board won’t make new postings magically appear, Sid.” Rielle mused, rocking back and forth on her heels nonchalantly, borderline impatiently. Rielle and Sid were standing side by side as a light snow began to descend on Ishgard, a dusting of white flecks beginning to coat the au ra’s metallic armor and greatsword. They had been standing outside the Forgotten Knight for what felt like an eternity, and although her jacket was well insulated, Rielle didn’t like spending unnecessary time in the cold streets of Foundation. “No new marks though?” The board looked empty, beside for some older postings from months ago.

“None. Again.” Sid huffed. Supporting himself with one hand planted firmly on the brick wall of the building, his eyes continued to scan the tattered and torn papers that littered the board. Old postings shouldn’t be left on the damn board, he thought to himself. It had been several days since a new hunt bill had been posted, and the weeks prior had dwindled in postings and sightings of monsters. There were occasional lulls in hunts, which was to be expected, but nothing compared to the current dry spell of quests. Sure, there was the usual beasts that roamed the frozen wastelands of Coerthas, and often farmer’s would need them slaughtered to protect their livestock. But the best money was found in more desirable, and dangerous, prey. Prey that had seemingly disappeared overnight.

“Well, “ Rielle began, folding her arms across her chest and tilting her head slightly. “There’s always mercenary work, Ardolain always has some ideas or people looking to hire some-”

“I’m not working for anymore of Ardolain’s clientele after that last disaster of an escort.”

“It wasn’t that bad, I got most of the blood and feathers out of your under armor and gauntlets.”

“Rielle...” Sid sighed, closing his eyes and pinching the bridge of his nose as he grew more annoyed remembering the incident.

“And the pay was good....well, after you threatened to shake him down for all the gil in his pockets.”

Oh, right. He had almost forgotten about that part.

Rielle continued. “Oh! And Remember that time you managed to lose half of Camp Dragonhead’s Karakul herd? Actually, maybe asking Ardolain for more work isn’t the best idea after all with your track record...”

Grumbling to himself, Sid turned to face Rielle. She had grown much taller since they had first met during the Dragonsong war, but he still managed to stand several heads above her. She had grown out her seafoam green hair, styling it in a side braid that ended slightly past her collar bone, with small wisps sticking out behind her pointed ears. Outgrowing her trademark smock and snow boots, she donned a more fitted, ornate jacket that fell to her knees with a furred collar that kept the chill off of her neck. Her leggings were a darker shade of blue, similar to her old tights with brown boots that stopped below her knees. She looked like a typical citizen of Ishgard, an observation that Sid often teased her about. That’s where the similarities ended for Rielle, however. Despite her appearance, her personality did not lack spirit and fire when unknowingly (or knowingly) harassing him about his questionable quest abilities or berating him when he came back from hunts bruised and covered in blood- his own or of another. It was partly his fault though. As Rielle opened up and grew less shy, she had began to take after him in personality and banter- Which could be a good or bad thing depending on the situation. Still, it was nice to have someone around who could spit retorts back at him.

“I never said I was good at things besides fighting and maiming, so I don’t know why you told Ardolain i’d take quests from those prissy highborn shites! I just thought that there’d be something to fucking hunt today, It’s been weeks since anyone’s posted about an A rank, let alone an S rank.”

“I don’t think standing around and arguing about your lack of interpersonal skills is going to get us jobs or quests. Can’t we just call it a day and go home? It’s freezing and I have new conjury books to read.”

Although she had a point, Sid was reluctant to give up the search so quickly. If he could find something to do, anything to avoid menial tasks and babysitting missions, he’d take it in a heartbeat. Halone knew that he was done with babysitting after taking Rielle under his wing, and the whole fiasco with Myste years ago. Still, the early winter sun had already begun to set, signaling that night would fall within the next few hours. There was no point in trying to go out into the highlands for a quick kill- the last place one wanted to be was in the open snowfields of Coerthas in the middle of a snowstorm. Rielle was right, Sid begrudgingly agreed, and it would be better to continue searching for work tomorrow when the weather had improved and the day was fresh.

Sighing and admitting defeat, Sid rested both his hands on his hips and motioned his head in the direction of the Jeweled Crozier. Rielle, understanding Sid’s lack of words, beamed happily and set off in the direction of their makeshift home, a slight bounce in her step.

Home was the best way Sid could describe it, although it wasn’t exactly their home. Tucked away in a small alley on the busy Jeweled Crozier, was a small abode that suited Sid and Rielle’s needs perfectly. It was far away from the bustling crowds and sounds of the merchant row, but close enough that it was convenient enough to repair armor and weapons when needed or pick up something to eat after a long day out in the field. While the exterior was a

bleak cobblestone, like most of the ishgardian architecture, the inside was a bit homier and welcoming. While Sid had forbid Rielle from getting too creative with the interior decorating, the living quarters were still warm and showed proof that someone was living there. The living room was furnished with a large sectional pushed up against the far wall, paired with a matching table set and a basic carpet that covered the cold stone floor. A modest fireplace occupied the other wall. The kitchen, while small, served the two well when it was actually used, although Sid avoided cooking entirely after almost burning the brume down with Fray many years ago. At the back of the room were small bedrooms. While Rielle had taken some artistic liberty in decorating her space with various books, new conjury spells and other small knick knacks she had acquired, Sid left his bedroom in the same state as when they had moved in- empty, besides for a bed, a small side table and a work space for his armor and chainmail.

By the time Sid caught up with Rielle, she had already unlocked the door and settled on the couch, removing her heavy outer coat and shoes at the entrance of the home. Closing the door to the wind and snow, Sid glanced over the still smoldering embers in the fireplace, grateful that they had left them burning before setting out earlier that morning. While he had spent most of his life in the cold grips of Coerthas, the cold still occasionally got through his layers of armor and clothing and froze him to his core. Brushing the remaining melting snow off of his shoulders, he removed Deathbringer from his back and placed it carefully in the corner of the room, next to a bound leather-wrapped greatsword of smaller size.

“You’ve got snow stuck to your horns again.” Rielle chirped, realizing that Sid was unaware of the ice frozen to the outer edges of his angled dark horns. Muttering a curse under his breath, he reached up to his horns and began to scratch away at the cold icy material that clung to him. Freeing the last of the ice clinging to him, He sat down next to Rielle, placing his arms over the backside of the couch.

“And some in your hair too.”

Much to Rielle’s shock and surprise, Sid responded by closing his eyes, shaking his head furiously, and letting snow chunks fall out haphazardly onto the couch and Rielle. Once he was satisfied with his method of snow removal, he shot a bored glance over to Rielle, who was now caught in a whirlwind of laughter.

“Is that better?”

Catching her breathe, Rielle responded. “Much better.”

The two sat in comfortable silence- Rielle opening her newest conjurer book, pen in hand to write notes in the margin while Sid remained quiet, eyes closed, still wearing his armor sitting beside Rielle. This is how they spent most of their evenings, Rielle babbling about a new technique she was learning, or how she spent the day wandering Ishgard, listening to the stories vagrant adventurers told at the Forgotten Knight. It was familiar. Pleasant even. While Sid would never admit it, the life he had grown accustomed to the past few years felt comfortable, something he had felt or experienced since he was a small child. It was nice.

He opened his eyes and frowned. They wouldn't have any of this- the house, the peace of mind, even possibly Rielle- without Aunyx, and yet Sid hadn't seen or heard from her in over

year.

She had managed to show up in both their lives at a most pertinent time- when Sid had lost Fray, and when Rielle had been persistently pursued by Temple Knights. She, who had little knowledge or reason to trust either of them, had risked her life to defend Rielle against the tyrannical church that would have slaughtered her if given the opportunity. The same miqo'te who faced Myste and his conjurings of fallen would-be heroes and peace makers, without a hint of fear or doubt. And won when Sid had failed.

It had been 2 years now, since Aunyx had departed Ishgard. She had written letters infrequently back to them, but even those had stopped as the months passed by. Rielle was upset at first, worrying that something had happened to her. Sid, however, knew her better- she was probably wrapped up in another Scion catastrophe. And when the rumors and gossip arrived in Ishgard, his suspicions were right.

Sid had heard murmurs in the tavern, about a dark haired miqo'te leading the Ala Mhigo Resistance to the east of the continent. How Ishgard was getting pulled into a war they had no reason to be fighting in. Discussions of primals being summoned and felled by a lancer of unprecedented strength. There was only one who could do those things. He knew she had other matters to deal with, considering her title and fame across the realm. Primal feller. Nidhogg Slayer. Azure Dragoon. A Warrior of Light, Blessed by Hydaelyn, or something. But still, it had felt nice having another Dark Knight around, even if she did bring trouble wherever she went. She had left most of her fending armor behind, saying that a Dark Knight wouldn't be welcomed where she was going. And she left her broadsword, now collecting dust in the corner of the living room. He had thought about moving the weapon to more discreet location, away from potential prying eyes, but decided that leaving it in the same spot she left it would only be respectful.

He understood her reasoning for leaving her belongings behind- It would be treason to wield the dark arts as a Warrior of Light in the political turmoil that was unfolding. No, it was better for her to leave this part of her behind. At first, he had almost hoped she would return once her duty complete, but as the two years dragged on, he had come to accept she was preoccupied with much larger issues. Nay, he had barely thought of her the past year, almost forgetting that the only reason they lived in this apartment was due to the fact she was gifted it by none other than Aymeric de Borel, Speaker of the bloody House of Lords. Before leaving, she had entrusted the home to Sid, telling him to keep it clean for whenever she eventually returned, adding a point that she would pummel him if she found any holes in the walls or wind damage from Rielle's aero casting practice. Looking back, it seemed that she had used that excuse to give him ownership of the place. Like she knew she wouldn't return.

No, it was better this way.

Or at least Sid had convinced himself that.

Aunyx pulled a “I’m going to the gas station for milk be right back” on DRK fam, rude. Content (happy even?) Sid is a good Sid.

Trying to stretch my legs writing these two, they are hard to pinpoint ;;;7 Tried to give a sibling vibe more than a parent/child relationship, hopefully the banter is in-character. Visually speaking, I think the Alliance coat of Healing would fit Rielle really well, considering the climate in Ishgard and the clothing she has in-game. Maybe she ran off and did some Ghimlyt dark dungeon runs....

Sid is still in Chaos armor because he’s a scrub that doesn’t like clothes shopping (AKA i still really love the chaos armor set)

More Aunyx content later, I just wanted to get the introduction out for these guys.

Age range i’ve come up with that is closest to my idea of ‘canon’ is Rielle is 14, Sid is 29. What a grouchy old man.

# Hunt

## Chapter Summary

Sid gave an agitated sigh, finally averting his eyes away from her gaze. Fury, he was going to regret this.

“No aeros, no stone throwing, and for god’s sake no holys.” He warned, looking back at Rielle with an already displeased expression. “You’re going to heal, and that’s it. I swear, Rielle, I bloody swear if you let one rock fly this is the first and last time I take you anywhere near a hunt...”

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Finally.

After a week of waiting, there was a new scrap of paper haphazardly nailed to the center of the hunt board, it’s corners already beginning to rip from the unforgiving Coerthas winds. Rank S, Last seen north of Camp Dragonhead. 20,000 gil to whoever could bring it’s head to the Hunt Captain stationed inside the camp’s fortress. The only problem? The description of the prey in question was too vague, the only notable description being that the monster was a large emerald dragon adorned in orange stripes. No mention of aggression level, potential weaknesses, or even the *size* of the damn thing. Typical, house knights weren’t notorious for getting up close and personal with anything perceived as a real threat- and an S rank was exactly that. A hunt was a hunt though, Sid thought as he tore the contract off the bulletin board.

It was early morning, a crisp chill hanging in the coerthas air as the sun rose over the spiraling towers above Foundation. It was part of a morning ritual he had development after undertaking hunting contracts- waking early, checking the board, talking to the usual patrons and bartenders at the forgotten knight. Having a predictable schedule was difficult as a mercenary, so any sort of routine was welcomed. Usually he made the rounds by himself, though this morning he was not alone. Rielle, who usually wasn’t one to wake early without some sort of bribery, was attentive and alert at Sid’s side, her face largely obscured by a gray woolen scarf.

“I can’t see what it says” Rielle balanced on the tips of her toes trying to get a glimpse of the parchment in Sid’s hands. “I wanna see where we’re going.”

“*We* are not going anywhere. You’re staying here.” Carefully folding up the parchment, he slipped the paper between the dark metal plates of his armor- he wasn’t about to let anyone else catch a glimpse of the hunt proposal and potentially kill his mark before he had a chance

to even reach the Gates of Judgment. The likelihood of someone else seeing the post before him were slim- The streets were only now beginning to bustle with activity. And the chances of someone who could actually challenge such a monster were even slimmer. No. He had an advantage, and he wasn't going to let it slip through his grasp.

Turning his attention to Rielle, her unhappiness was immediately apparent with the idea of being left in Foundation and Sid could already see the frown growing on the young elezen's face, her eyes glaring at him like daggers. He exhaled a long sigh and rubbed his temple - this was going to turn into another argument. He continued, trying to calmly explain his reasoning.

"S rank. The last thing I want to deal with is watching my back and yours. You're nowhere near ready to fight something like this."

"I can heal you though, if it's an S rank you're going to need help."

"You don't need to watch over me like i'm some mewling pup. I'll be fine."

"You always say that," Her face was flushed red from the cold air, though Sid wondered if it was from her mounting frustration with him. "Instead of healing you when you come limping back home bruised and battered, like always I might add; I could keep you from getting hurt in the first place."

"I don't come back *limping* !"

"Yes you do," Rielle spoke a little louder this time, meeting Sid's gaze with a concerned and disheartened look in her eyes "You come home covered in scrapes and cuts bleeding from all sorts of wounds, and I have to heal you so you don't bleed all over the place..." Her voice was getting louder, the disappointment in her voice growing by the second. Shite, this was going to be one of those kinds of arguments. It was too early for this, goddamnit.

"Listen," He started, carefully choosing his next words. "I'm not doing this to be difficult- it's just--"

"I can help if you just gave me the chance" Rielle interjected, ignoring Sid's attempted rebuttal entirely. "I can take care of myself now- I've studied and practiced and I'm not going to get any better unless you let me try. I've helped before, so why not now? Please, Sid. I'll be good I promise, I'll listen and stay out of the way."

However much he didn't want to agree with her, she had a point. Through their, misadventures, Rielle had shown her innate skills in conjury. Between the encounter with countess Ystride and Myste summoning Ompagne, Rielle was no stranger to combat. Since then, he had watched her meticulously practice healing spells and devour entire conjury books in a matter of days. She could mend wounds, cast protective shields, even conjure complicated regenerative spells. Rielle was dedicated to learning the art of healing and she was good at it, that much was apparent. She had come so far from the first bouts of conjury that Fray had taught her long ago, back when she was a shy and reserved girl of barely 11

summers. It was understandable why she was frustrated- she wanted to prove herself, to be needed; It was Rielle's nature to help people. It was a trait that Sid both admired and vehemently hated considering her need to always jump at the chance to help others.

Sid gave an agitated sigh, finally averting his eyes away from her gaze. Fury, he was going to regret this.

"No aeros, no stone throwing, and for *god's sake no holys*." He warned, looking back at Rielle with an already displeased expression. "You're going to heal, and that's it. I swear, Rielle, I *bloody swear* if you let one rock fly this is the first and last time I take you anywhere near a hunt..."

Rielle's expression softened, a large grin stretching across her face. She was almost beaming with happiness, and Sid couldn't quite tell if it was because she had bested him in an argument or if she was happy to be accompanying him on the hunt. Either way, he was happy to have Rielle back to her usual, cheery self. While he wasn't ecstatic about taking her along, Sid much preferred a happy Rielle over a moody, irritated Rielle- even if it meant purposefully dragging her into rugged terrain and facing a monster he knew little to nothing about. Perfect, absolutely perfect.

"You won't even know i'm there, besides the healing, of course." She grinned, turning to head back to the Jeweled Crozier.

"I mean it Rielle, nothing, absolutely nothing, besides healing. You got it?"

"Perfectly clear."

Finishing their argument outside of the Forgotten Knight, the two spent the rest of the day to gather resources and prepare for traveling. Returning to their residence, Rielle occupied her time by finishing the latest conjury book she had picked up from the market days before, while Sid muttered and cursed more than usual. Never one to feel nervous, especially before a hunt, he couldn't help but feel uneasy about purposefully involving Rielle in a dangerous situation. Putting himself in harm's way was something he often did without a second thought- He had been doing it for years, once under the watchful eyes of his mentor and the battles he had fought alongside Fray. Adding a conjuror with little battle experience to the mix? That was another beast altogether. Was she going to stay out of the way? Would she actually listen to him? Or would this entire thing be a clusterfuck of a disaster that required House Fortemps guards to intervene and save their arses from being roasted alive? Gods, he was tense and they hadn't even left Ishgard yet.

"It must take a lot of effort to look so irritated all the time." Rielle's voice abruptly brought him back to reality. She leaned comfortably against the doorframe, a book tucked in her arms. How long had she been standing there?

"Not at all, it comes naturally. Any reason for lurking in the doorway, or did you just want to remind me what my face looks like?"



She should've expected that answer, it was his usual response when she mentioned his trademark scowl. "I figured I ought to ask when we leave in the morning."

Ah, yeah. Details. If she was tagging along, he had to give her more information that usual.

"Before sunrise. i'd rather get out of the city before the guard switches- the morning watch is talkative and it takes ages to get past the gates. Night guards are usually tired as hell at the end of their shift and just wave you through, no questions asked."

"That's so early though..."

"You don't have to come if that cuts into your precious sleep schedule."

Eyes narrowing, Rielle crossed her arms in front of her chest. "You're not getting rid of me that easily."

Sid, wearing a smug expression, knew persuading her was out of the question. It was going to take a lot more than a few missed hours of sleep to change Rielle's mind. "Didn't think I was, but I thought i'd try regardless."

-----  
-----  
Just as he had said, Sid and Rielle had set off just before the sun had peaked over the mountains, and the two slowly began the trek to their first destination- Camp Dragonhead. While the previous day had been clear skies with a gentle breeze, a stormfront had begun to move in the night before, laying a fresh dusting of snow on the city. Fighting in snow and wind wasn't optimal, but the conditions were bound to only get worse the longer they waited- Coerthas snowstorms often lingered, dumping huge amounts of snow in a matter of days.

Crossing the bridge was uneventful, much like Sid had predicted. The guards had merely waved them through- no questions, no small talk, not even a side glance from any new recruits who hadn't seen the imposing Au Ra before. Rielle, walking a few steps behind him, Let out several yawns as they made their way across the bridge. Though visibly tired, she had awoken early with little complaint, a welcome surprise considering how she was an unsociable nuisance most mornings.

Sid was thoroughly impressed. "You really wanted to tag along, didn't you?"

Another yawn, though this time Rielle's face showed fatigue, her green eyes peeking out from under her heavy hooded eyelids. "What gave it away?"

"Well," He began, raising his hand to his face in a questioning manner, a small smirk noticeable under his fist. "It's between waking up before noon and managing to not be a complete chocobo arse about it."

Receiving only a grumbled, incoherent reply, the pair continued to the camp without much conversation. The Central Highlands were as usual- poor visibility, unforgiving winds and

completely inhospitable and barren besides the occasional flock of Bateleurs. As grim as the surrounding landscape was, the pathway to the Dragonhead had been recently shoveled, a welcomed sight after trudging through snow drifts on the Steps of Faith. Ever since the end of the Dragonsong War, Ishgard had made attempts to seem more welcoming to outsiders and adventurers- an effort that had been overlooked by most in Eorzea. After initial interest in the once mysterious kingdom had passed, the Holy See of Ishgard had made few improvements with other cities within the alliance. The public was too reserved and fearful of outsiders, a trait inherited after being secluded within city walls for years upon years. Nonetheless, Ishgard continued to make strides towards improving relations with the rest of the continent, most notably by maintaining and improving paths and roadways in the Coerthas Highlands. House Fortemps had been in charge of the operation, a fitting choice since their outlook on adventurers and outsiders were more...favorable than the other great houses.

Passing through the gates into the camp's courtyard, the camp still seemed half asleep- besides for a few guards at their post, the settlement was empty. Sid made a point to stop by the camp's makeshift tavern anytime he passed through on a quest or hunt- the bartender had ears like a hawk and knew nearly everything happening around the camp and about adventurers passing through the area. Making their way through the bar's battered doors, an older elezen behind the counter looked up from the glass he was cleaning. His mostly grey hair was short, though pieces of auburn strands were still visible in small sections. He gave a chuckle and a smile, averting his eyes back to the work at hand once he recognized Sid.

"Haven't seen you in awhile. "

Sid pulled out the hunt declaration, and slid it across the countertop towards the bartender.

"Ah, I was wondering if it got posted to the hunt board in Ishgard. Been causing some problems around here for quite awhile now, surprised they didn't put up a reward sooner." The bartender finished cleaning the cup he had been polishing and gently placed it on the shelf below the bar.

Propping himself up against the counter with his arms crossed, Sid leaned to his side to bear the weight of his body and armor. "Was hoping you might have some more information on it."

The elezen shook his head. "Fraid not. All I know is that they've been calling it Safat, and that it's managed to pick off some of the less experienced knights that were foolish enough to go looking for it. Emmalian's went ahead and told the knights not to bother with it." He lowered his voice so that only Sid could hear him. "The poor bloke doesn't know what to do except wait for an adventurer to pass by and take care of the mess. I know it's only been two years since he took over as head of camp, and the boy shows promise, but he just can't commit to anything big like this. It'd be a whole 'nother disaster. Anyways, I haven't heard any sightings for the past few days, but that could be because of the storm rolling in. That's about all I know about the bugger."

"Think a broadsword is enough to take it out, or am I a fool to try without backup?"

"Hm." The elezen took a second to think, looking Sid up and down. "Think it's possible, even if it's a longshot. Although I assumed the little green haired girl was with you."

“She is, but not as backup. She’s going to heal me *and that’s it*. Sid’s emphasis was aimed at Rielle, who was sitting at one of the empty tables eavesdropping on the conversation.

“Well, at least there will be more of you there to kill it.”

Silence.

Sid turned his entire body around, his expression now sharply pointed at the elezen. “Did you just say ‘more’ of us?”

“Oh I forgot to mention that didn’t I...someone came through camp last night and took a hunt declaration from the Hunt Captain. Nobody got a good look at them, they were wrapped up in a heavy cloak, well prepared for the climate out here. Headed out right afterwards.”

“Looks like someone beat you to it Sid.” Rielle hummed sarcastically, knowing full well how this news would get under his skin.

“How long ago exactly did they leave.” was all Sid could say without losing his temper. He was restraining himself all things considered- wanting nothing more than to flip the table Rielle was sitting at. He hadn’t taken into account a passerby to stop at the camp and talk directly to the Hunt Captain. At this point, whoever it was had a several hour head start over him. Was it even worth going out now? There was a real possibility of trekking out into the middle of nowhere and running across an adventurer with Safat’s head already ready for turning in.

The elezen watched as the internal conflict brewed in Sid’s mind. Having a large, potentially angry Au Ra in his small tavern lose his shit was not on the bartender’s agenda for the day. Eventually, the elezen spoke, trying to diffuse to the tense situation.

“It’s still worth a shot heading out now before the storm worsens. The other fellow might not have even run into the monster at this point.”

“And you’re sure it was only one person.”

“I’m only passing along information I heard from the Hunt Captain- Single adventurer, nobody with them.”

Sid was silent for a moment, before turning to Rielle. “We’re heading out. Now. I’m not going to let some wandering adventurer get my mark. Let’s go.”

Rielle almost jumped out of her seat as Sid made an abrupt beeline for the door, his chainmail rattling in the wind as the bitter chill filled the tavern. She gave the man a small smile before falling in line behind Sid, who was now visibly irritated, and headed towards the northern gate of the settlement. It was going to be a long day ahead for both of them.

I got snowed in at the end of last week and just got to leave my house on Thursday, SO I should have spent more time on this, but I went a bit stir crazy being stuck inside for 5 consecutive days.

Still trying to get used to writing Sid.

ALSO sorry for really long intro, I didn't expect it to be so long, but here we are....

I'm also going to go ahead and change the rating to mature. Between the language, and violence that's depicted in later chapters, I don't think teen is a high enough rating. There may also be more sexual content later, but I'm not entirely set on anything yet.

Thanks for the kudos, this is entirely self-indulgent so i'm glad other people enjoy it!

# Reunion

## Chapter Summary

Aunyx-focused chapter, needed to write something a bit easier and familiar. I've been drowning in job applications and real life garbage, so sorry for delay in posting this. This is all over the place but ahhhhhhhHHHHH. Not my favourite chapter i've written but it needed to be done.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Ice crunched under Aunyx's sabatons as she dismounted her crimson-feathered lanner, snow beginning to fall heavily around the Coerthas Highlands. While the night before had been clear skies and gentle winds, a stormfront had pushed through in what seemed like a matter of hours. Coerthas was known for fast changing conditions, but even this was ridiculous- and it was bound to only worsen into the afternoon. It would be in her best interest to find this damn dragon, kill it *fast* and return to Dragonhead before the sun set behind the mountains and the freezing chill really set in. Steadying herself as she landed in a ankle deep snowdrift, she raised her arms to block the blowing snow, squinting her eyes towards the northern reaches of the valley. The Highlands were shrouded in windblown snow and hail, a white haze restricting her vision to less than a mile, at most. Trying to locate the monster in the developing blizzard-like conditions was going to be nearly impossible, although it was a welcomed distraction from her current thoughts and concerns.

In usual circumstances, monster tracking brought back fond memories of her adolescent years in the shroud, gathering animal pelts and skins for the Gridanian leatherworker's guild. Meticulously tracking paw prints and sightings of animals was something that always brought Aunyx a sense of pride and accomplishment- and it was steady, welcomed work from the leather workers and armorers of the Shroud. The current conditions, however, were making this hunt more frustrating than rewarding. She had set off almost immediately after receiving the hunt bill, foregoing any rest at the camp- not that she would have gotten any real sleep anyways. Restful sleep had eluded her since the bloodshed in Ala Mhigo, and had been instead replaced with erratic naps and long, sleepless nights. It was quickly approaching a full week without proper sleep, and Aunyx was unsure how much longer she could go without passing out from exhaustion. Through all her travels, exhaustion had never fatigued her like it did now. Sure, she had felt tired, been injured and weakened, but none of that compared to the weight she carried on her shoulders now. Whether that was from the mysterious voice that unwillingly plagued her mind off and on -or the stress and worry over her friends- she wasn't entirely sure. Maybe a few days rest would have been beneficial, even

if she had to put up with prying eyes and questions from the knights back at Camp Dragonhead.

Her tattered cloak whipped and pulled in the winds, sending a shiver down her back that froze her to her tail tip. This was absolutely miserable; the wind, the cold, and the godawful wet feeling as the snow infiltrated and melted in the open gaps of her bonewiccan boots. A concerned chirp erupted from the large falcon, flapping its wings to remove the snow that was beginning to freeze to its delicate feathers. Aunyx gently soothed the bird, petting its large beak gently with her gloved hand. The bird pressed its beak against her hand, nuzzling into her palm with soft, nervous coos. It wasn't ideal for her mount to be out in this weather either, the bird was accustomed to warmer updrafts and much more arid regions. The sooner she found her prey, the sooner both of them could get out of the elements and into a nice, dry stable or room.

She had left Ala Mhigo almost a week ago, waiting until the dead of night to sneak away from her room and leave the sanctuary. Aunyx knew that Yugiri, who had chosen to stay in Ala Mhigo to watch over her recovery, would have pleaded and begged for her to stay. Or worse, tell Lyse of her plans to leave the safety of the Ala Mhigan Quarter. It was easier to sneak away in the middle of the night, her destination unknown to those who would have tried to stop her. However shameful she felt, Aunyx knew she had to get away, far away, and just be alone. She needed to process everything that happened without someone breathing down her neck and watching her every movement like a hunting hawk. Lyse and Yugiri meant well, that much she knew and knew well, but the echoes of the mysterious voice in her head made Aunyx hesitant to stay. While the voice had only plagued the scions, would it spread to others? She didn't want to test that theory. Leaving the Ala Mhigan Quarter wasn't selfish, she had told herself. It was the best for everyone involved in this hellish mess unfolding before the Alliance. Her friends, the resistance, herself. Her wounds and physical ailments had healed just enough to allow her to travel by air, choosing her faithful lanner as her preferred escape method. Traveling by Aetheryte would have been easier, and much faster, but the chance of being caught and questioned by resistance guards was much higher- a risk she wasn't willing to take considering the current situation regarding the advancing Garlean Empire. She was also unsure if her body could handle the aetheric current and subsequent apparition that followed aether travel- her plan was to attempt travel once she healed more in Foundation with shorter-distance aethernets around the city. That could wait though. For now, her plans were to lay low until reaching Ishgard, find a place to hunker down, and have a moment to gather her thoughts and plan a new approach to the developing situation at hand.

The plan hadn't included getting roped into a S rank hunt, however. A regrettably old habit of checking huntboards had managed to put her Ishgard plans on hold, at least until Safat was slaughtered and the head brought to the camp's Hunt master. If she didn't take the hunt, she knew it could be weeks, possibly months until another capable adventurer passed through the area, and even then it wasn't a guarantee. No, she was more than capable of taking the dragon

down, it was her *duty* even, as a Warrior of Light, no matter the pitiful state she was currently in. The hefty 20,000 gil reward was also a welcome sight to behold after leaving the majority of her fortune in Kugane with Tataru for safe keeping. In normal circumstances, this hunt would have been easy for her. The thrill of an easy, meaningless fight. Something that didn't involve politics, wars, or corrupt nations. No differing opinions, ideals or grand schemes. Or people. Killing people was something Aunyx felt she had done enough of as of late.

Aunyx stood in the snow motionless, her eyes focused on the ground, an almost emotionless expression worn on her face. She had taken so many lives. More than she would have ever expected when she agreed to fell eikons. She had watched the life leave her enemies eyes as she pushed her lance into their chests. Heard their beastly screams as she sliced through their limbs and bodies with the sharp edges of her weapons. Watched as they drew their last breaths before leaving their physical bodies. And she had done this, over and over *and over again* . How many had it been? Too many to keep track of, too many nameless enemies cut down in an attempt to protect herself and others. Hell, she couldn't even remember the first person she had killed in the name of Hydaelyn, a moment she thought would be deeply ingrained in her thoughts and memories. And she couldn't even recall their face. A feeling of anguish filled her stomach at the thought of the atrocities she had committed in the name of a god. A god that had since abandoned them, destined for another failing star. A god that she believed in. Or, at least, had believed in. Her days of fascination and loyalty to Hydaelyn had severely waned, though she would not admit it to any the Scions.

The irony in the grand scheme of the things, Aunyx thought, was that the Scions found their purpose in killing gods. Whether it was beast tribes or those who had felt wronged by their supposed protectors, the Scions of the Seventh Dawn found steady work in destroying deities of others that they themselves had deemed dangerous. In her younger years, Aunyx did not question this- though as her knowledge of the world grew, she began to question Hydaelyn's driving force for eradicating primals. Yes, they were dangerous. But what of Hydaelyn herself? An all knowing god that allowed these primals to be summoned in the first place? If she was so powerful, what was stopping her from preventing these summonings? These pointless wars and destruction? Surely the Ascians and their diety Zodiark, albeit powerful, were no match for Hydaelyn's great power? And yet she had abandoned those most loyal to her. Hydaelyn wasn't even even here *now*, when her faithful Scions had succumb to an endless slumber. She was off somewhere else, leaving a void in Aunyx's mind. Like apart of her was missing, a once familiar voice, gone. A piece of her soul, missing. Replaced now with a haunting voice of god knows what. And another, one who she had not talked to in a long time....one who had remained strangely quiet through her travels in Othard.

"It's been a long time." Ah, there it was. All it took was a fleeting moment of remember who they- *no* , who he was. And he was there, almost instantaneously.

“Did you come here to berate me on taking up more pointless quests, because that’s the last thing I need right now.” Aunyx said plainly, not bothering to turn around and face the man she knew had manifested behind her.

“Normally, I would. But given the situation, it seems you’ve already done my job for me. You look like shit.” Fray was never one to shy away from being direct. At least, the Fray she knew. “You’ve only got yourself to blame for the sorry state you’re in.”

Normally his words dripped with a slight hint of sarcasm, though this time he was more direct. She could almost sense pity in his voice. Pity aimed at her.

“If this is your attempt at a pep talk, it’s not working. Go crawl back to whatever abyss you came from, i’m not in the mood to deal with you.” Turning around to face Fray, her gaze was met with piercing yellow eyes peeking from the slits in his dark helmet. While his face was obscured, she could tell the expression he wore was annoyance.

Toe-to-toe in the worsening blizzard, neither spoke- Aunyx shifted uncomfortably under his gaze, his beastly eyes now scanning over her with a fleeting glint of concern. On one hand, she was relieved to see Fray- his presence within her mind had been absent for months, and before that he had uttered few words besides the occasional helpful hint or word of encouragement during battle. But he had disappeared from her conscious soon after the liberation of Ala Mhigo. On the other hand, Fray was just, so...Fray. Whether he was berating her on accepting more quests than she could realistically accomplish, or dissecting her fighting stance in the middle of a fight, he always knew how to push her buttons. In this moment, however, the silence growing between them was concerning. Frighteningly, even.

“When was the last time you communed with the abyss?”

Thankful as she was that the silence was broken, Aunyx didn’t want to admit the truth- she hadn’t communed with the darkside in...how long had it been? Long enough that she couldn’t distinctly remember. *Shite* . When Fray, and later Sid, had taught her how to properly commune with the darkness inside herself, they both had stressed the importance of communing regularly. To commune with the darkness inside yourself was to be at peace with the chaos within your heart, your very soul. To set ablaze the abyss within one’s body when it was needed. At first, despite the discomfort of facing the dark energy within herself, she attuned regularly. Remaining in Ishgard after the events of the Dragonsong War made it easy for her to practice the dark arts. While she was not particularly skilled with a broadsword (a



fact that both Fray and Sid could agree with, after many sparring sessions), manipulation of the abyss and dark aether came shockingly easy to her. Her ease with the darkness did not make it easier to practice, however, and soon after leaving Ishgard, and most of her fending armor and claymore behind, she had become lax in her communions, until stopping altogether.

“It’s...been awhile.”

“That was a rhetorical question, I know you don’t know. You haven’t communed since we first arrived in... whatever that eastern port city was. Our last charity cause to places unknown.” He almost spat those last words, waving his hand erratically in the air. “The Scions just *needed* us to follow them halfway around the world for some political mess we had no hand in creating. Ah, but it’s for the *good* of Eorzea right? Bring peace and prosperity to the entire world, was it? And how did that end up?”

“The war’s not over it’s just- it’s a just bit complicated.” She held her head in her hands and turned around, already growing tired of the conversation at hand. Going to Ishgard was supposed to ease her worries, not exacerbate them. “Everything’s complicated right now. I just..I just need time. To fix it. To fix everyone. Everything.”

“Tell me then, where does running away fit into our plan?”

Yet another pause between the two, staring idly at each other. This time, Aunyx turned around and gazed past Fray, Avoiding eye contact, she realized he had caught onto her plan. Or lack thereof.

She should have known better. Where she ended, Fray began. Sometimes, especially times like these when Fray used words like “us” and “we”, she had a hard time distinguishing what thoughts were her own and which were Fray’s. Of course he knew there was no plan after reaching Ishgard- Aunyx had purposefully avoided the thought of what she would do when she arrived. And her thoughts were his thoughts, afterall.

“You’re running away from your problems with your tail between your legs. You commit to setting yourself ablaze to help others unworthy rescue, but when it gets too tough, you *run* . You’ve done it time and time again- Don’t try to deny it as i’ve witnessed it.”

Aunyx didn't need Fray to elaborate- her thoughts were flooded with the memories of Zenos yae Galvus, the Doman war, the early attempts at liberating Ala Mhigo that ended in the slaughter of countless innocent bystanders. Even earlier memories of fleeing dragon-infested settlements right here in Coerthas. Watching as Ishgardians fled in terror from Iceheart's loyal followers tearing through the streets of Ishgard.

Fray continued. "You think you can atone your mistakes by making up for it- like this hunt for example. How does this solve anything besides assisting some lazy knights who can't manage to kill a single damn dragon?"

"It...doesn't." As hard as it was to admit, Aunyx knew she had been pushed into a corner. There was no use in trying to defend her actions, knowing that any attempts would play right into Fray's hand.

"At least you can admit it- That's improvement over the first time we met."

"The world is unfair."

"Unfair? Yes, but that's life. Nothing is fair- it just is." His voice became melancholy, taking a few steps towards Aunyx. He reached out with his gloved hand towards her, palm facing upward, fingers slightly curled. He continued. "The sooner you accept it, the better off we will be. Nothing comes without a price. But you already know that."

Reluctantly, aunyx reached out, slowly moving towards the outstretched hand before her. As soon as her fingers reached Fray's, her hand effortlessly cut through the illusion, the dark black and blue aetherial wisps disintegrating as the slightest touch.

Fray gave a dry chuckle, watching as his fingers returned to their former aetheric illusion once Aunyx removed her hand. "See? I've paid my price."

A shrill screech broke the tension between the two warriors, echoing off the cliff walls and landscape. Aunyx's head swiveled towards the source of the sound, her purple eyes attempting to focus through the now white-out conditions that had developed. Through the heavy precipitation, the shape of a large, dark monster appeared, its wings struggling to gain

lift as the wind howled. It's pelt was a dark shade of rustic green, and had several spikes lining its back and head. No doubt, it had to be her target. The animal gave another loud cry, before descending into the valley below, disappearing as quickly as it had appeared.

"There's no use in telling you not to follow it- best to go now before you lose sign of it in the storm." Fray sighed, his usual attitude and demeanor returning. He faced away from Aunyx and his body began to disintegrate into the air - the illusion he had manifested was fading, a sign that his conscious would return to the depths of her mind and soul crystal.

"Try not to burn yourself alive to keep others warm, Aunyx."

While the remaining wisps of dark aether faded, Aunyx climbed onto the back of her falcon, sliding her feet into the stirrups and pulling back tauntly on the reigns. Her lanner chirped, spreading its wings into the gale and taking flight. The conditions, as she correctly predicted, had taken a turn for the worse during her fleeting reunion with Fray. Her mount struggled against the wind and ice, using its large wingspan to flap aggressively against the battering storm above them. It wouldn't be easy, but she could still finish the hunt, albeit it was now a race against the clock- between following the dragon to a place she could fight and the now setting light that was already severely impaired by the clouds and snow. *Fury*, this favor had turned into a huge headache, for many reasons.

*Try not to burn yourself alive to keep others warm, Aunyx.*

Fray's last words echoed in her mind. She knew there was truth in what he had said- before she had ignored his warnings, though this time she couldn't help but dwell on it. This was the last thing her mind needed right now, especially going into a fight. She attempted to shake the growing worry from her head, focusing instead on shifting her weight to a standing position in the saddle. Loosening her grip on the reigns, she motioned for the bird to descend into the valley beneath them, the last place she had seen the dragon before it disappeared into the haze. The bird folded its wings against its body, and the two descending in a controlled free fall towards the rocky surface below.

## Chapter End Notes

Aunyx wears a full set of Bonewicca skinner gear, dyed Maroon. I'm bad at describing her features ahhh. But hopefully that gives you an idea. I'm posting this super early (1am) so if there are errors, i'll catch them on my read through sometime later today.

Once again thanks for kudos, subs and comments!

# Clash

## Chapter Notes

I'm back and I definitely didn't rush this chapter. Nu-uh. No way. This was also a hard chapter to write. Bleh.

I wanted to wait to continue the story until we got the last patch before Shadowbringers- Due to ingame events there may be some canon divergent plot stuff in the timeline I have drafted. But that's later.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Behind the rocks, *now Rielle!*” Sid hissed over his shoulder, Deathbringer drawn quickly from his back, his eyes locked the beast. The dragon had quickly descended from the thick layer of fog encompassing the Highlands, and now stood challengingly before them.

As luck would have it, Sid and Rielle didn't have to spend long looking for the dragon- It had found them even in the thick hailstorm plaguing the highlands. Descending from the clouds and landing heavily on a large boulder, the earth shook with enormous size. The dragon, now perched on a pile of boulders, flapped its wings against the winds, clearing any remaining snow from the surrounding area. The only sound heard in the gorge was the whistling of the gales, and the violent swaying of the fir branches in the storm's grip.

Sid had been right- the hunt posting had been incredibly vague, especially considering that this thing was the size of a *goddamn building*. It was easy to see why the monster was causing Camp Dragonhead so many problems and headaches- Between the rows of orange spikes adorning the dragon's head, the jagged fangs that protruded from it's mouth, and the various scars and wounds spread across its body, the monster had seen it's fair share of combat. This was going to be a lot more complicated than he had originally planned, and it was going to take a lot more than some haphazard swings and strategic cuts to even begin to bring it down. *Fucking great*. Almost sensing a hint of doubt in the Dark Knight, the monster let out a screech, it's roar reverberating off the snowdrifts and cliffs surrounding the battlefield.

Tightening his grip on his blade, Sid lowered his gaze, his blue eyes entirely focused on the monster before him. Rielle had retreated to the nearby rocks, a place where she would be safe- so long as he held the dragon's attention. He cast a quick glance to Rielle, confirming her location and safety, before focusing inward. Drawing a deep breath, he began to let the

darkness swell inside his chest, a warm and familiar feeling engulfing him, his dark aether beginning to swirl around his hands and blade. This is what he knew, what he had spent his life perfecting- combat. He gave a quick smirk, before throwing his blade into the air, an ominous haze circling the weapon as it drew its strength from the darkside. Lowering Deathbringer, Sid pulled back his shoulders, readying himself as he awaited the dragon's response.

The dragon reacted just as Sid had hoped. The monster, now enraged at the threatening display that Sid had performed, leapt from its vantage point and landed within ten feet of him, its size even more apparent as the distance between them shortened. Now closer to the beast, Sid quickly began scanning its hide for a potential weakness, a place to focus his strikes and slashes. There had to be a weak point, somewhere. He didn't have much time to think before the dragon charged at him, its muscled forearms cutting through the deep snow with ease. *Shite*, it moved much faster than he had anticipated. Dodging, Sidurgu was able to evade the dragon's charge, but his movement had been greatly impacted by the weather conditions, and his armor was beginning to collect clumps of snow in its chainmail and steel plates. The longer the battle dragged on, the more difficult it was going to be to maneuver- something that was already made tedious by the weight of his armor in normal circumstances. This wasn't the time to think about that, he thought, and shifted his attention back to the situation at hand. Any distraction, any loss of focus, could end this fight as quickly as it started. Taking advantage of the beast repositioning itself, Sid launched himself at Safat, plunging his blade into the thick, scaly hide at the monster's chest. He pushed downward as the blade struggled to sink any deeper into the monster. The weapon drew a long cut into its victim, blood swelling to the open wound and oozing out into the cold air. A clean hit, one that even Sid was surprised worked as well as it did. Safat gave a visceral cry, a sound much less threatening than before. Pulling his blade from the monster's body, Sid took several steps back to increase the distance between the two, his guard still high. A single cut wasn't going to kill it, but it was a damn good start.

Almost immediately the dragon whipped its head around and lunged at Sid, its mouth gaping open to reveal rows upon rows of sharpened teeth. He had little time to react and attempted to dodge to his left, although it was not nearly fast enough. Avoiding the worst of the bite, Safat's teeth scraped against his pauldron, large puncture marks leaving its impression on Sid's armor. He staggered and steadied himself with his blade thrust into the frozen ground, not expecting to take a hit so quickly after inflicting a decent wound on the monster. Sid lifted a armored glove to his shoulder and, while he had avoided any bite wounds, the sheer force of the dragon colliding him had left him winded, and certain that a bruise would develop. As he adjusted himself and readied for the next attack, he could feel a much softer current of aether flowing around him. The pain in his shoulder began to melt away, although a manageable ache still lingered. Healing could only do so much, after all.

"Keep that up Rielle." Sid called out, knowing that the elezen could hear him from her hiding spot amongst the rocks. Teasingly, he added "A shield would have been nice there though."

“Shut up, I’m working on it!” Rielle replied, conjuring another healing spell as she fought against the winds to keep her balance on the uneven terrain. However much Sidurgu teased her, there was a small part of him relieved that she had pestered him to come along. Rielle managed to conjure a Divine Benison around Sidurgu, the faint glow of a shield glittering around his body, before retreating up the rocky terrain to a more sheltered vantage point.

The exchange between the two was short, as the dragon whipped it’s head back towards Sid. This time, he was prepared for the attack and lifted his greatsword to deflect the deadly mouth hurtling towards him. Metal met teeth and flesh, and Sid pushed back against the monster with his blade in hand. Using gravity to his advantage, he pushed down hard on Deathbringer, carving a fissure in Safat’s lower jaw. Abruptly the dragon pulled back, taking several steps backwards as the new wound in it’s mouth opened, spilling more blood. The warm liquid dripped brightly onto the snow, leaving red puddles staining the otherwise monochrome environment. Sid had the upper hand now, even for a moment, and took his chance. Focusing his energy into his sword, he unleashed a blinding light of aether and sent it directly into the beast’s side, tearing through it’s delicate wings. The force alone was enough to rip through it’s winged membranes, it’s wings now unusable. The dragon faltered, taking several steps back before the weight of its body forced its legs to buckle beneath it. Safat lowered its head closer to the ground, pulling its now tattered wings closer to its bloodied body.

The battle was now in his favor. An easy 20,000 gil, good as secured at this point. And no sign of the wandering adventurer who he had worried so much about- this hunt was his and his alone. Sid removed one of his armored hands from his sword, letting the blade trail in the snow as he began to take several steps towards his prey.

“We’re done here.” Sid raised his broadsword up into the air, staring into Safat’s glossy, golden eyes. Suddenly, a deep, rumbling growl erupted from its throat, a faint glint in it’s eyes. Sid hesitated for a moment, noticing the shift in the dragon’s composure.

What Sidurgu didn’t expect was the long, whip-like tail that swiftly came from behind him, slamming directly into the back of his legs. He fell to his knees, scrambling to grab his weapon with his free hand. He had been overconfident in his victory- The one thing that Ompagne had always berated him about. *Never underestimate your opponent until their head is in your hands*, the words flooded back to Sidurgu. Muttering curses under his breath, he looked up just in time to watch a large, clawed paw hurtling towards him. The two collided- the impact flung Sid into the rock wall behind him, rendering him almost paralyzed, the edges of his vision blurring. Through the loud ringing in his ears, he could make up the sound of Rielle’s voice, urgent and crying out for him to reply. His eyes tried to focus on the blurry body of the creature limping towards him, but the force of the impact had *fucking hurt*.

*"Shit shit shit."* He spat, his fingers struggling to grip onto the hilt of his sword, trying to pull himself upwards out of the deep snow. Struggling, almost panicking, He hoisted himself upwards with a grunt, feeling the unpleasant sensation of his injuries. His side burned hot with pain, making any deep breaths near impossible. Unsteady on shaking legs, he held his sword low as the dragon approached, limping awkwardly, but approaching nonetheless. Sidurdu's eyes narrowed, trying to focus his vision as it blurred in and out- focusing. And fighting, would be much harder now, and he was more likely to make a mistake considering the condition he was in. If he could somehow get a clear shot of it's throat, maybe he could deepen the wound he had inflicted earlier- if it was deep enough, and at the right angle, he could maybe cut through to it's windpipe, and let it choke on it's own blood. That would slow it down, at the very least, right? Bloody, and slow, but effective. Or maybe a blow to its front legs, he wouldn't have to worry about another punc-

His thoughts were interrupted as a flash of pure white erupted around him, enveloping the area in a shadowless light. Bright, intense light flooded his vision of the dragon, as it cried out in pain. Momentarily confused, Sidurdu's expression turned into anger.

That was a *fucking Holy*.

As the light faded, he could make out Rielle's casting coat among the rocks, her staff raised as she finished casting the spell. She gave a stern, yet concerned look at Sidurdu, acknowledging that she had broken her promise. *You can yell at me later*, she seemed to say through her expression. Turning her attention back towards Safat, she began casting another spell, the green glow from her staff intensifying as she levitated the rocks around her, and flung one directly into Safat's injured jaw.

Safat snarled, it's anger building as Rielle threw more rocks, shifting it's attention away from Sidurdu. Rielle's face was emotionless, solely concentrating on all her trainings, all her lessons, into casting stone after stone at the beast. Each hit, Safat grew more irritated, it's attention now focused on Rielle entirely. The dragon turned it's body away from Sid, snarling as it began to scale the rocks, displacing boulders as it dug its claws into the hillside. Realizing the situation had turned against her, Rielle stood motionless, almost frozen in fear. She wanted to move, *to run*. She tried to move her legs, but found herself completely unable to do anything but watch as the dragon inched closer, scaling the wall with ease despite of it's injuries.

*"Stop throwing stones and MOVE."* Sid called out, quickly assessing the danger that Rielle had now put herself in. This was exactly what he was afraid of, why he was so hesitant to bring her to a hunt-sure, Rielle could cast magic in the safety of Ishgard with no problems, no



fears. A fight- a real, unchoreographed fight, was different. The speed, the stress. Rielle was young, she didn't have the experience to block out the battle, to turn off the emotions that made her such a competent healer in any other situation. He was angry; not only at her for breaking her promise, but at himself for bringing her along.

"MOVE, *now* Rielle! Get away from it!" He continued to shout, struggling to grasp any lingering energy from within his soul stone. A single, well placed hit was all he needed to draw the monster's attention back to him. Grasping his chest armor with his gauntlet, he tried and tried to muster any remaining aether he had. Nothing. His hands were shaking now, clinging against the steel chest plate. He had to do something. *Anything* . Realizing that his only remaining choice was raw, physical damage, he used his remaining energy and hurled his sword at the direction of Safat. The blade missed, instead sinking into a snowdrift besides the ascending dragon. Safat diverted it's attention momentarily away from Rielle, eyeing the sword, then back to Sidurgu. He hadn't thought his plan completely through- he was now injured, unarmed, with nothing to defend himself with if the dragon chose to return it's focus back to the Dark Knight. He would deal with that later- he just needed it to lose it's interest in Rielle.

Safat locked eyes with Sidurgu, and for a moment Sid thought the plan had worked.

"Come here bastard, fight me instead!" Growling through barred teeth, Sidurgu staggered a couple of feet forward, pushing through the ache in his side. He wasn't going to give up, and he was especially not going to die in some god forsaken cold wasteland by the hands of a shitty, overgrown lizard.

Suddenly, a shadow flew across the snow in front of him, the shape small at first but growing larger as it moved. Safat motioned it's head towards the sky, letting a subtle, confused growl fall from it's injured mouth. It's eyes darted back and forth, almost as if it was searching for something. Whatever it was, Sidurgu thought, it got the dragon's attention off Rielle, even if it was temporarily. Rielle picked up on this as well, as she continued her escape into the higher reaches of the cliffs.

Out of the cold, snowy air came a lance, it's metal a deep, dark maroon with silver embellishments. The spear, moving with alarming speed, flew into the back of the dragon, it's head lodging itself deeply into the olive hide. Safat reared up, crying out as it slid down from the rock wall, grasping at boulders as fell. Sidurgu instinctively tensed up, wishing now that he hadn't thrown his sword earlier. The attacker must have been airborne, circling the area for god knows how long, probably waiting for the opportunity to strike.

Following the lance, a dark, shrouded figure fell from the sky, landing perfectly upright in the snow behind the dragon. Their face was obscured by a ornate helmet, it's shape resembling a skull, horns adorning each side of the mask. They wore a maroon outfit, similar in style and color to the lance, although the top was tattered and burned, burned at the edges and stained with dark colors. As quickly as the new opponent appeared, they were airborne again, this time leaping onto the dragons back, pulling the spear out of it's victim. The figure flipped backwards, gracefully landing into a defensive position behind the dragon, the spear dripping blood from it's point. Safat whirled around, snarling as it raised it's paw to strike at the new enemy. Too slow, the figure was much faster than Sidurgu, dodging quickly and switching to an offensive stance, noticing that Safat was wide open for a counterattack. The spear found the wound that Sidurgu had opened earlier in the fight, and was thrust into the opening with a ripping noise as the flesh was further torn open.

Whoever this was, they were fast. Fast enough to out maneuver every attempted hit, swipe and bite that Safat threw their way. Every attack, they had a counterattack to match, inflicting small, but numerous cuts and stabs on the flesh of the beast. Annoying as it was to be outmatched by an unknown opponent, Sid was thankful they had chosen to intervene when they did. The attention had been diverted off of Rielle, and Sid was able to retrieve his sword, now able to rejoin the fight. The Lancer, a miqote by the look of the tail swishing back and forth behind them, glanced and nodded at the Dark Knight, acknowledging that it was going to take two to fell the beast. The lancer began weaving their spear behind their back, switching between hands as it created a mesmerizing motion. They were drawing the dragon's full attention in their direction. A distraction to create an opening for a final strike. Sid nodded, hoping that he understood correctly what the lancer was doing. Silently he strafed through the snow, careful to not make sudden movements or sounds as his armor drugged along the ground. He had just enough energy, hopefully, to carve into the monster's neck. Still preoccupied with the lancer's movement, Sid took one final moment before expending all his energy into a final blow, his broadsword slamming into the harden scales at the top of Safat's throat. The blade met resistance, he pushed harder, throwing every last ounce of energy he had into forcing the blade through the thick skin. Safat screamed, its attention drawn towards Sid as it realized what was happening. The lancer took the opportunity, and swiftly pierced the spear into its chest, twisting as they sunk the weapon deeper and deeper into the dragon's chest cavity. A shudder, and the dragon's body went limp, it's limbs twitching before ceasing to move. The monster's blood gushed from both wounds, melting the snow underfoot the two mercenaries as they both stood still, waiting to confirm the dragon's death. Sid held his breath, half expecting the dragon to rise again, but Safat stirred no more. The mark was dead. Finally.

Pulling his blade from Safat's neck, Sid attention turned towards the adventurer. Both hunters faced each other as the heavy snow wafted around them, the silence growing as they sized each other up. From under the mask, the lancer gave a weak smile, before reaching up to remove their helm. Sidurgu braced himself, unsure of what the lancer was doing.

The lancer removed the helmet slowly, wisps of dark wine colored hair falling to their shoulders. Sidurgu's expression grew confused, before smirking and closing his eyes. He reopened them, his signature frown returning to his face.

"Well, you're the last person I expected to see in Coerthas. Where the hell have you been?"

Aunyx stood before the au ra, holding her helmet at her side, a drained expression on her face. She looked tired, worn down, as if she hadn't slept in days. The Warrior of Light looked absolutely defeated, despite the smile that stretched across her face. Sidurgu's eyes wandered to her ear, noticing the fresh wound scabbing over. What the hell had happened to her? What had happened in the past two years since she disappeared?

"I've been...well, it's a long story. But i'm back, it's good to see you too, Sid."

Chapter End Notes

PS WRITING FIGHT SCENES IS HARD I HATE IT LOL IM SORRY FOR LONG DELAY.

# Homecoming

## Chapter Summary

AHHH. So uhh life update- got a full time job, moved outta my parents, got my own place, and have been very busy with work OTL And also Shadowbringers, but that's another thing lol.

This is super late, but I AM STILL WRITING I PROMISE. Here is a new update. I will go back, as usual, and make edits tonight. feels good to update this though :) Hoping my writer's voice comes back, i think i lost a little bit of it in my 3 month break....

Well.

This isn't how she expected the hunt to turn out.

Weary and worn from the fight, Aunyx leaned against her lance to steady her shaking body. Adrenaline was coursing through her veins, something she hadn't noticed until she had stopped moving. This was her first fight after Ghimlyt Dark- and she could tell she had overdone it far too soon. It felt as if all the healing her body had done the past week had been undone in a matter of minutes. The worst of the pain stemmed from the headache growing near her brow- a sign that she shouldn't have, quite literally, jumped into her usual fighting style. No new wounds, thankfully. And no reopened injuries. A small victory.

Before her stood Sid, his armor covered in blood, although she wasn't sure if it was his or Safat's. He too looked fatigued from the fight, his breathing heavy and slightly labored. Besides the red liquid staining his armor and the new damage to his pauldron, he looked the same as she remembered- ridiculously tall, at least compared to everyone else in Coerthas, unruly as ever hair, and piercing blue limbal rings that were so sharp they could cut through iron. At his side was Deathbringer, it's blade still sharp, though a few new nicks were visible on the blunt edges of the decorative plating. No surprise, it had gotten some use while she had been away. It had, after all, been a few years.

Guilt burned inside her, the realization of how long she had been away. It had literally been *years*, though to her it all felt like a blur. Time wasn't something she kept track of during her travels, a trait that she had grown to despise. How much she had probably missed. Small things, big things. She could have at least written- she had made attempts early in her travels, but fights and skirmishes, not to mention always being on the move, had become an

obstacle.. News from Eorzea traveled slowly across the ocean to Shirogane, and even slower into the small rural settlements that dotted the foothills around the Steppe. It shouldn't have been an excuse, but she had let it become one. This had never been her intention, but the Scions and the many conflicts in the world had always pushed her far away.

“And here I thought I'd have to fight someone over this hunt mark.” Sid huffed, a relieved tone hinted in his voice. “Didn't think I'd need someone to save my ass instead. Glad it was you and not some eager passerby.”

Ah, yeah. He hadn't changed.

Aunyx merely nodded, avoiding his gaze as she turned her attention to the dragon's corpse beside them. The blood had stopped spilling from its neck, but now the two mercenaries were faced with a new problem- the pair were in no condition to move the head of the monster back to dragonhead. She wasn't even sure if either of them had the strength to shave the dragon's head from its neck. For all the effort Safat had been, it continued to be a problem even after she laid dead.

“Aunyx!” A high-pitched voice cut through the silent tension growing between the two mercenaries, and her attention turned to the direction the voice had rang out. Quickly moving down the rocky slope, Rielle lept from boulder to boulder, her staff gripped tightly in her mitts. She scrambled down the last rock, taking a large leap to the snowy ground below, before catching her breath.

She was unharmed, thankfully, though her breathing was labored and wafts of green hair clung to her forehead. Her emerald green eyes shone distinctly against the whitewashed landscape, the glitter of her fiery personality shining in her irises. Rielle was taller than Aunyx now, another reminder of the time that had passed- She had been a few inches shorter than Aunyx the last time she had seen the elezen. Her features had sharpened, though she still had the soft expression that carried a sense of calmness and comfort.

“Can you tell me what in the seven hells you were thinking?” Sid moved towards Rielle, the venom in his voice practically dripping as he glared at her. “We agreed, no combat- *Nothing at all, no exceptions* - and you deliberately ignore me and start casting spells-”

The softness in Rielle's features harden, her expression turning dark as she stood her ground against Sidurгу berating her.

“I wasn’t going to sit idly by and let that thing, *that monster*, kill you. You were already hurt, and it was...” her voice grew quiet as she trailed off, not wanting to finish her thought. Rielle mustered up some courage, and although her voice was shaking, she continued. “It’s over, i’m fine, you’re fine. It’s okay.”

“It’s not okay, we had an agreement and you broke it. This is why I never take you with me.” Sidurgu huffed, exacerbating the wound on his shoulder. He wanted to say so much more; the fear he still felt in his throat watching the dragon inch towards her, the anger boiling inside him that she had broken his trust, and the relief still washing over him that she was safe and although very visibly shaken, unharmed. But the growing ache in his arm derailed his train of thought as he gripped the damaged pauldron that was now oozing fresh blood from between the chainmail.

“This conversation isn’t over.” He started, inhaling sharply as he rolled his shoulder blade back, trying to stretch the muscle he could feel already tightening. “But we need to start heading back towards Dragonhead before we lose any more daylight.”

His attention turned back towards Aunyx, surprised that she had not intervened in the heated conversation. Her gaze was focused elsewhere, her expression hard to read. Sidurgu eyes narrowed. While she had never been easy to read, her current disposition felt incredibly off to Sidurgu. She seemed distant, and far more reserved than he had remembered. The last time he had seen her this way was their first few encounters- which was understandable given the circumstances. The time away from Coerthas had done *something* to her, but exactly what, Sidurgu had not the faintest idea.

As if she could feel his gaze lingering, she spoke.

“Sid’s right, we need to get out of the storm before nightfall.” acknowledging that she had, in fact, been listening to the quarrel. “But first, how are we dragging this corpse back with us?”

“That’s a good question.” For all their effort of felling the beast, getting it back to the camp was going to be a battle in itself. For most of his recent hunts, he had fared well with clear skies and gentle winds. This time, they were not as fortunate. Along with the deteriorating weather conditions, His injury would make hauling a piece of the corpse back to Dragonhead a complete nightmare of a task. All things considered, he would be a fool to leave the body for some passerby to pick up the bounty. “You want to do the honors of beheading the bastard, or should I?”

-----

The march back to Camp was exhausting, as expected, as the snowstorm howled on. Any trace of daylight was soon extinguished, as the storm began to take its hold on the valley. Aunyx's tail and fur was frozen with various icicles, her boots full with melted snow and her under clothes damp with cold sweat. Rielle, despite her best efforts and usually sunny personality, couldn't shake the feeling of the coerthas chill down to her very bones. Sidurgu was grumpier than Rielle had seen in ages, his armor damaged, covered in snow and uncomfortable to walk for miles in half frozen. He hadn't said a word since they had set off again for camp. The day had been miserable from start to finish.

Sidurgu, with the assistance of Rielle's restoration spells, was able to sever the dragon's head from its body with a quick cleave from Deathbringer, a mess of blood trailing behind them as they hiked through the accumulating snow. Much to her falcon's dismay and discomfort, Aunyx had been able to secure the dragon's head with a variety of ropes and well-placed cords onto her mount's saddle. She could deal with getting the blood stains and other various, unknown liquids out of the saddle another day. While the hunt had been a mess, the silver lining was nobody had sustained serious injuries ("Besides Sid's pride" Rielle might add privately to Aunyx).

The battle could have been far worse had Aunyx not arrived in time. Sidurgu didn't want to linger on the thought, but it had dominated his mind since his adrenaline had subsided. Where had he made the first mistake? Overconfidence, his master would say. He was always too confident. Too sure in his abilities. Blind to small details in a fight. Fray had always managed to turn the tides of a friendly spar to his advantage, never underestimating his opponent. Well, he did once. And that cost him his life. Sidurgu frowned, pushing that memory back into his subconscious. The last thing He needed was to think about that now.

"How much further?" Rielle's voice was tired, defeated and completely remorseful as she whined. Any sign of excitement that she had shown earlier in the day was completely abandoned, instead replaced with fatigued and a hint of regret.

Neither of them answered her question.

Aunyx, despite her best efforts to hide the pain, could feel the slight limp returning in her leg and the increasingly mind numbing headache festering in her brow. She had taken up the rear of the group, trying to hide her injuries from both Rielle and Sidurgu. She didn't want to hear concern, full knowing that it was from a caring place among friends. She had enough of that with the Alliance, with the Scions. Everyone, really. Aunyx detested the feeling like she was some fragile piece of delicate treasure. Or worse, a weapon that they had to protect from forces that would use her 'gift', as so many called it, against Hydaelyn. Less and less she felt like a person and more of a weapon to be pointed at Hydaelyn's enemies. she didn't want to explain herself either, the months of turmoil in the east or the raging war occurring on Eorzea's borders with the Garleans. And so far, neither Sidurgu or Rielle had bothered her about it. How long that would last, however, she was unsure.

The voices that had fallen silent since the battle at ghimlyt, had returned since fleeing Ala Mhigo. Faint at first, but they returned nonetheless, regardless of her attempts to hold them back.

*Throw Wide the Gates;*

*Listen to my voice, listen to our heartbeat;*

*Only you...can forestall the calamity;*

The difference voices echoed against each other, some growing louder, while others grew fainter. The competing voices fought to be heard, a battleground inside her own head that she couldn't escape from. Neverending, it seemed. gnawing at her sanity. They never did last, though they were more frequent and louder each time they graced her with their presence. As the voices waned, albeit temporarily, Aunyx's vision cleared and she was brought back to reality.

The group had stopped a ways in front of her, both Sidurgu and Rielle staring back at her with concerned faces, albeit Sidurgu's expression was more obscured. Trying to diffuse the situation and prevent any prying questions, She gave a weak smile, perking her feline ears slightly forward to appear more alert and focused. No matter how hard she tried to hide her fatigue, she knew the bags under her sunken eyes gave her away immediately. One could guess she was tired from the fight, or tired from her travels. It wasn't a stretch to think that the Warrior of Light would have some lingering injuries from previous fights as well, she thought as her mind raced for excuses and lies. *Please don't ask, please just keep walking,* Aunyx pleaded inside her mind.



Sidurgu said nothing, instead taking what felt like an eternity to turn around and continue their pace. Rielle, on the other hand, grew more concerned, returning a faint smile before her expression turned more solemn, peering off in the direction Aunyx had been staring at moments earlier.

Sidurgu knew Aunyx was a terrible liar, but even this was some of the worst lying he had ever seen her attempt to pass off. She didn't have a limp before leaving Ishgard, though that was something that could have happened in any skirmish. No, what really troubled him was the way her eyes would wander, seemingly staring at nothing in monochrome landscape. How she would be there with them physically, but be utterly checked out mentally. It had happened twice already. He couldn't recall this happening before she had left Coerthas, meaning something had changed since her departure. It was an unnerving feeling, though he couldn't place why it bothered him so much. Maybe she was tired? He had no idea where she had been traveling from. But why hadn't she traveled by Aetheryte? Another question to add to the growing pile of uncertainty. The question still lingered why she had fresh wounds to her ears and face, a condition he was unfamiliar seeing her in. While she had sustained a number of injuries during the Dragonsong War, she was always in high spirits and bounced back almost instantly, with a fervor that ignited the same passion in her comrades and friends. Instead, she was reserved and quiet, almost trying to hide something. But what?

However much he wanted to press her for information, for details, for what exactly had happened to her, Sidurgu restrained himself. If she wanted to share, she would have told them. It wasn't his place, he thought, to interrogate her for the truth. Not in the condition she was currently in, at least. There could be times for question when they had both rested and nursed their wounds, and without Rielle to interject. It would be best to approach her without Rielle hovering over the two of them.

While preoccupied with his thoughts, Sidurgu could make out the faint glow of the torches illuminating the entrance to the camp. The walk back to Dragonhead had been gruelling, but they could at last collect the bounty, rest overnight in the barracks and then head back to Foundation tomorrow morning. Another question arose- Would Aunyx come with them, or did she have another place she was headed? The answer could wait- for now, he looked forward to shedding his armor and cleaning up beside a hot fireplace with a heavy sack of gil.

# Lull

## Chapter Notes

I have not abandoned this FYI but you betcha i forgot about it for a hot minute whoops

“When the guards told me two adventurers had gone out hunting Safat, i didn’t expect for a warrior of light to drag back it’s bloody corpse with an infamous knight.” All of the color had drained from Emmanellain’s usually warm face as the two hunters stood before him in his office, their armor still stained with blood and frozen snow. He hadn’t expected for anyone to return to the camp anytime soon, let alone that night. Most who wished to challenge Safat had been found days later, their bodies almost unrecognizable from missing limbs and grotesque mutilation. Instead he had been greeted by an imposing au ra and a small miqu’te with a much more familiar face. The fire in the study had recently been stoked, it’s flames producing a warm hue glowing across the bodies in the room. Aunyx shifted her weight off her injured leg, trying to ignore the snow that was melting into her under clothes in the warm room. Sid meanwhile, avoided emmanellain’s gaze, visibly irritated and sore from the earlier skirmish.

“If i’m being truthful I didn’t think we were going to get rid of it so soon, considering the lack of forces due to the fight up at the border-” Emmanellain’s mused to himself, before redirecting his attention back to Aunyx and Sidurgu. “In any case, I’m grateful for both of you taking care of Safat. We can start sending out patrols again without worrying about losing more guards.” He leaned back into his chair, resting his elbows on the ornate desk in front of him. His gaze hardened, the usual smirk across his face was replaced with a much sharper expression.

“I’m guessing you didn’t do this out of the goodness of your heart, however.”

Sid huffed, his patience already spent dealing with Rielle. “Dangerous work doesn’t come cheap.”

Emmanellain beckoned to the guard besides his desk, drawing them over to his side. The two exchanged whispers, before the black haired elezen nodded, and the guard exited the chamber, a gust of cold air infiltrating the room. The temperature had dropped considerably, the wind’s howling gusts audible from inside the thick stone walls.

The room was silent for several moments, the only sound emanating from the gales outside and the occasional snap of burning lumber in the fireplace. Emmanellain's gaze darted between his two guests, lingering on Aunyx. Finally, he spoke, his voice slightly quivering as if he was almost fearful of speaking.

"...I was under the assumption from Aymeric that you would be at the frontlines of the quarrel at the border. This is...unexpected. Seeing you so far from Gyr Abania, I mean. I'm thankful you are here though. We have been dealing with that monster for weeks. I can't tell you how many of my men have come back in body bags. I was starting to worry we were going to have to call in reinforcements from Durendaire's house."

She froze, blindsided that Emmanellain was so straightforward for once in his life. She could feel her pulse rise, beating just below her skin. She knew she shouldn't have accompanied Sid for the reward collection- she wasn't even going to take any of the gil. In her tired and fatigued state she had exposed herself to someone who could blow her entire act. *What a stupid, foolish mistake*. Aunyx couldn't tell if that was Fray or her own voice inside her head, berating her for missing such a small detail. Trying to keep control of the situation, Aunyx met the elezen's gaze with unfaltering purple eyes.

"I'd like to keep this encounter between just the two of us." Her voice, thankfully, came out strong and sure, no sign of the fear growing in her chest.

"Oh?" Emmanellian's eyebrow raised slightly, his interest now piqued in why she wished to remain anonymous. He exhaled a deep sigh, raising his hand to prop his chin up. "It's only fair, you did take care of my problem. I am surprised though, old girl, do the scions know you are here?"

"They don't. And I would like to keep it that way."

She could feel Sid's questioning gaze glance over to her, though she didn't meet his eyes. She kept them locked on Emmanellian. He would ask questions later, no doubt, and she could deal with them at that time.

Emmanellian nodded, no longer pressing with more questions. "Is that so. Very well, I will inform my captain. It will be like you were never here."

“Thank you.” Aunyx nodded, feeling her pulse slow.

“As for both of you, and the girl who was with you earlier, you are free to rest here in the camp overnight, or for however long you need. It’s not the greatest accommodations, but it’s better than traversing back to the city in these conditions.” Emmanellian offered, noting the weary expressions worn by his guests. “If you require healing, we also have surgeons specializing in battle wound magicks and regeneration.”

“I’d rather bleed out than let a damn temple heal me-” Aunyx shot Sidurgu a glare, hearing the insult he spoke under his breath.

“Neither of us need healing, but thank you for your generosity.” She quickly interjected, elated as the sound of the creaking door sounded from behind her. The guard had returned with a jingling bag of coin, and tossed the reward at the miko’té. She caught the bag with ease, noting the hefty weight of the bag. Emmaellian, for however cunning he was, wouldn’t short them gil. He had gotten smarter since taking his post at Camp Dragonhead compared to his younger years.

“As promised from the hunt proclamation, 20,000 gil. Split between the two of you.” The black haired elezen spoke, the tiredness more apparent in his voice. It was late, and most of the camp had already settled in for the night. “You both seem more than qualified to sort out the gil between yourselves. I’ll take my leave now. There is room in the Lancer’s wing of the keep; Try and not make a mess of the place with your bloodied armor.”

---

“As if I would let anyone *fucking* touch me who works alongside the Temple knights.” Sid chagrined as Rielle began to peel back the clothed, bloody layers from his bicep. The blood had dried against the wound he had sustained from earlier, and Rielle now struggled to remove the clothing gently to better access the open wound. Tugging uncomfortably against his skin and scales, Rielle pried the cloth off his shoulder, reopening the wound with fresh blood trickling down against his snow white complexion. His Breastplate and gauntlet placed beside the bed in a pile, it’s various dings and scratches illuminated from the candles lit around the room. There were small pools of melted snow and blood pooling on the wooden floor alongside wet footprints leading from the door to the room. *So much for not making a*

*mess of the place* , Aunyx thought. The room was empty except for two beds, end tables and a small chair pushed into the corner of the room. The wall farthest away from the door had a large window with thin drapes framing the foggy glass, the shutters vibrating in the wind outside. Had it not been for the fire, the room would have been freezing.

During their meeting with Emmalellian, Rielle had already found her way to their accommodations, lighting a roaring fire in the hearth and preparing her materials for finishing Sid and Aunyx's wound care. She had patched them up enough to travel back to the sanctuary, but now that they were safe from the elements, she could inspect their wounds closer.

Aunyx sat across from him, watching as Rielle worked quickly at preparing his shoulder for healing. Rielle, her actions usually gentle and slow, removed the clothing quickly and roughly as Sid hissed at her.

"If you would sit still, this would be less painful." She spoke plainly, noting the fidgeting aura as moving underneath her hands. "It's going to hurt less if you stop moving around and let me get this bloodied rag off of you."

"Your literally ripping scales off of me Rielle." He retorted, motioning to the several scales that came off with the cloth. She scowled, and briefly hesitated before ripping another piece of fabric from his arm, taking even more iridescent dark scales with it than the previous pulls. He huffed before returning to his silenced state, sharply inhaling as Rielle worked to remove the last pieces of ruined fabric from his undershirt.

"How do you manage to ruin a piece of clothing every time you go out on a hunt." She questioned, placing a steady hand a few inches above the fresh wound now bleeding again. A faint green hue erupted from her palm, washing his skin in a bath of greens and blues light.

"I wouldn't have another ruined shirt if you would have listened to me like we planned." The warmth of the healing magicks washed over Sidurgu's bicep, a refreshing feeling considering how sore and bruised his shoulder had become since arriving back at the camp. However pleasant the sensation was, his eyes narrowed at Rielle.

"Can't that conversation wait until tomorrow?" Aunyx abruptly interrupted the growing feud between the two. Her voice had been more forceful and annoyed than she had intended. There

would be time to bicker later, she was sure, but all she wanted was to rest before her weary headache worsened. All the adrenaline from earlier had retreated from her body, and left in its place was a heavy weight that felt like it sat directly on her chest. She needed sleep. Or to try and sleep, anyways.

“She’s right, you can yell at me all you want tomorrow once we are back at home.” Rielle nodded, smiling at Aunyx as she prolonged the time before Sidurgu would berate her with a punishment for her earlier stunts.

“Fine.” Sidurgu gave in, silently agreeing that, he too, was too fatigued to continue any

More arguments. He turned his attention to Aunyx, who sat on the bed across from him, her armor removed leaving her in under armour clothes. Her arms were left bare, no longer protected from pieces of metal and cloth. In its place was fair skin, riddled with scars. More scars than she had previously had before leaving Ishgard. And some were fairly fresh. Bruises littered her skin. She had been in battle recently, more evidence besides her ripped ear.

“You never did say why you were in Coerthas.” He started, approaching the subject delicately, watching her body language as he continued. “You never struck me as the type to just wander back into Ishgard without a reason.”

As expected, Aunyx’s body tense up at the subject brought up, averting her eyes in any direction except Sidurgu’s. Rielle Continued healing, thought she too shifted her attention to Aunyx.

“You stopped replying to my moogle mail months after you left. Sidurgu said not to worry, but looking at the state you’re in now, I think he was wrong. What happened after you left?” Rielle chimed in behind Sidurgu, her tone woven with concern.

“Well, I...” Aunyx began tripping over her thoughts as she tried to come up with an excuse, a story that was believable instead of what had actually happened to her in the months after leaving Ishgard. There was so much that happened. Baelsar wall. The Ala Mhigan Resistance. Zenos. Traveling across the ocean, the steppe, the war escalating, voices...

“There’s a lot that’s happened. With everything, really...”

“I think we could figure that much out ourselves.” His words oozed sarcasm at her weak reply.

It would be easier to just start talking, but what would she say, where should she stop before exposing the truth of why she left Why she ran away? She wasn't entirely sure herself why she had done it, now looking back, how could she rationalized her choices to others when she wasn't sure herself?

“Between Ala Mhigo and the east, I've been busy with matters concerning the scions.” She stated, a neutral reply that wasn't entirely falsified. It was true, although lacking many important details and events. “We've been assisting in resistance support and uprisings against Garlemald, so I've been out of contact with most everyone in Eorzea.”

“You've traveled to the east?” Rielle's interests was captured, having only read in books about the eastern settlements in books she had found in the library, many of them tattered and notably out of date with information and history.

“I spent a lot of time there, yeah.” Aunyx mused, glad that the topic had branched off into something less, political. “I traveled through Kugane and the settlements scattered across Doma. We spent a lot of time in the Ruby Sea before that as well.”

“I've only read about Kugane in books, Are the shipping docks and market really bigger than Limsa?” Rielle questioned, finishing the regenerative spell she had been casting on Sidurgu's injury. The wound had been closed, leaving a scar across his shoulder. It ached still, but nothing that would inhibit his ability to fight again. Though unimpressed by Aunyx's answer to their questions, he was glad to see a more familiar side of her. Talkative. Like she had been during her days spent practicing the dark arts.

“It felt like the docks went on for miles, Kugane had everything we needed and more.” Aunyx's face lit up, recalling the happier memories of her time across the sea. “Anything you could get in Eorzea, they had. Or they had something even better.”

“And the food, so many different types. I had never had Buuz, but it's the one thing i really miss.”

Rielle's head tilted sideways, unfamiliar with the term. “I've never heard of it.”

“Oh, right. Well it’s like a steamed bun, with a filling on the inside. It’s a popular food with the xaela tribes that live on the steppe.” Aunyx explained, remembering the skillful hands of the xaela woman who would effortlessly roll the dumpling-like delicacy with ease.

Sidurgu’s body went rigid at the mention of the Steppe.

“Now that you mentioned it, we didn’t eat anything today. I’m starving.” Rielle complained, realizing that she hadn’t eaten anything since before setting out from Ishgard that morning.

“You can eat something in the morning.” Sidurgu sourly responded, standing up from his place on the bedside. He was still wearing his armor from the waist down, and the chains jingled as he made his way to the chair in the corner. Moving the chair to the middle of the room, he placed the chair directly in front of the fire. Sitting down, he crossed his arms across his chest, a scowl drawn across his face. Deathbringer laid to the side of him on the floor, the flames dancing off of it’s metallic reflection. “Sleep. We’re heading out early tomorrow.”

“Shouldn’t you be the one sleeping in the bed since you’re injured?” Grumbling, she watched as Sidurgu closed his eyes and tilted his head down towards his chest. “I didn’t spend all this energy healing you just to have it all undone by sleeping in a rigid wooden chair, you know.”

“And you should know that this is how I prefer to sleep.” He didn’t bother opening his eyes. The warmth of the hearth would be enough to keep him warm through the night, and he would be able to watch the door for any intruders or unwelcome guests. Aunyx’s deflection of his question earlier had been convincing to Rielle, but not to him. He wasn’t sure the reasoning for her secrecy- and until he did, he would keep his guard raised.

“It’s not my fault if you’re tired tomorrow, but don’t whine to me because you chose to stay up.”

Rielle said no more, admitting defeat. Blowing out the remaining candles lighting the room, she curled up under the covers, pulling the thick blankets up to her face as she quickly fell into a deep slumber. Aunyx too slipped under the sheets, wrapping her tail around her leg as she felt the heaviness of the day weigh on her. The bed under different circumstances would have been uncomfortable at best, but at that moment it was the most comfortable thing she had felt in days.

She hadn’t thought this far in her plan to run away. It would be near impossible to try and leave without Rielle and Sidurgu, but she ached for solitude. The months she had been away from her friends had been agonizing at times, but now that she was back she wanted nothing more than to sneak away. She could figure out her long term plans once she was back in



Ishgard. For now, an attempt at a restful night's sleep was all she could focus on before closing her eyes.

# Memory

## Chapter Notes

Shorter chapter than usual but I have had this draft for a bit and I feel bad for not uploading anything for 2 months. Enjoy 2 chapters in 24 hours!

Heavy Sidurgu focused chapter.

We are also officially into the start of the fic. Yay! It only took 8 chapters of set-up :^)

The shadows cast from the fire danced off the walls of the room, a soothing rhythm of orange and yellow hues scattered off the furniture. It had been some time since the group had gone to bed, the soft inhales and exhales from Rielle hardly audible from her resting place in the bed closest to the window. Sidurgu had barely moved since the others had retired, the faint metal from his waist armor ringing with any little movement. The fire luckily had been stocked with fresh fuel before everyone had settled in for the night, its flame still glowing brightly producing a pacifying warmth washing over Sidurgu's body. The room was comfortable, albeit a little humid from the melted snow that they had brought in from their armor and gear. Under usual circumstances, he would have taken the gil and left immediately for Ishgard regardless of the weather looming outside. He had been offered accommodations in the past, but his prideful, or stubborn, ways usually led him to turning down the offers. Now that he sat in a warm room, the wind beating against the stone outside, he would reconsider the next time someone offered him a place to rest for the night. The heat from the fire felt *good*, even if he was taking a handout from a high house of Ishgard. The only thing that would have made this any better would have been a nice, hot shower to remove the grit, dirt and sweat that clung to his knotted silver hair. That would have to wait until they got home.

Home.

Sidurgu had been blindsided at the earlier mention of the steppe. Coerthas was his home in every other sense, but memories from his childhood had resurfaced during the brief conversation from earlier that evening. He had been born in the steppe, no matter how often he tried to forget that part of himself. Repressed memories had slowly flooded his thoughts through the night, some as clear as the waters of Costa del Sol, others so blurred and faded that he could only remember tidbits of the memory. He remembered the vast grasslands and how they swayed in the light afternoon breeze, the stars brightly illuminating the jet black sky with constellations that seemed to go on endlessly. He remembered the busy, almost chaotic, afternoons clutching his mother's hand in the marketplace, the buzz of merchants and travelers drowning each other out in conversation. He could hardly recall her face anymore, the soft expression she wore or the way her unruly hair was pulled back into a

delicate braid. Her appearance had been lost to his mind for what felt like an eternity. But the distinct sound of her voice rang deeply in his head, a memory that he had not recalled for quite some time. It was the same for others- cousins, uncles, aunts. They were blurs in his mind, snippets of their faces or their laughs dotting fragmented memories. He knew that they had been real, of course, but some days Sidurgu had a hard time remembering his life before his life had been ripped away from him.

He remembered the day they left too, driven from their homes by the empire. The memory of his family and tribe, piling their few possessions into carts in the cover of the night, quietly pulling the cargo through the thick mud from the lingering monsoons that crept late into the season. He remembered the endless miles they traversed. The years he spent wandering from place to place, never staying for very long, always on the move. The long nights stuffed in a cargo hold beneath a shipping vessels deck, wet from ocean spray and salt clinging to his hair as they fled for a better life. The feeling of being outsiders in a foreign world. The loss of tribes people, the fearful stares from others whenever they passed through another settlement, only to be turned away and shunned.

Sidurgu stopped himself there, not allowing himself to think past those memories. He knew what would come next.

Those memories years ago drove him to feelings of anger. Rage. Regret. The same emotions that led him down the path he forged as a Dark Knight. Emotions that boiled under his skin and threatened to break free. The same emotions that were replaced with the darkness of the abyss to punish those who would harm the defenseless and the weak. Like he had been all those years ago when Ompagne had found him, motionless in the then snowless prairieland of Coerthas. That was the past, and the past was better off left where it was. Years had gone by since then, replaced with memories forged in Ishgard. Memories with Ompagne and Fray, later with Rielle and Aunyx. There was no point in recalling the bad memories of the past; The past couldn't be rewritten. After the encounter with the moogles, he had resigned himself to living in the present as much as he could, a promise he had made to himself that he had kept, for once.

He glanced over at Aunyx's armor and lance, which was folded and neatly placed in a pile near the stacked wood by the fireplace. *Ah, typical* . She was always the more organized one out of the two of them. When he would haphazardly shed his armor and fling it across the room of the inn they were staying at, she would scowl and pick up the skewn pieces, placing them methodically together in a neat stack. While neatly folded, her armor now showed signs of distress. He could make out stains of blood and mud in her pants and trailing skirt, an alarming fact considering her usual attention to detail. She was not the type to let her armor deteriorate in such a fashion. He distinctly remembered her having her gear repaired after

every battle, any small skirmish that left dents and dings in her gear. Another sign that something was aloof with her.

He scanned his eyes from the ground to Aunyx, who was obscured in a pile of blankets and sheets. Her ears were the only thing visible from behind the mass of bedding, twitching slightly ever so often.

He remembered the day they had met, Fray's broadsword dripping with blood, her knuckles white from gripping the hilt so fiercely. She stood over an unmoving body, red liquid splattered at her armored feet. She was small, and furred, tufts of feline ears peeking under her armored helm. A sight to see, considering most were of elezen descent in Coerthas. Looking back, she had been the first miqu'te he had met. Another outsider in Ishgard.

"He tried to kill me." She had said, the whites of her eyes visible and bright against her vivid purple irises. Her voice shook, but she remained focused as she looked up at the armored man clad in black and red armor. Judging by her disposition, this hadn't been the first time she had killed.

"Welcome to the club." Sidurgu spoke, his usual sarcasm dripping from his low voice.

From there, they forged an unusual relationship. Dragoon fighting in the neverending Dragonsong War by day, Dark Knight in training by night. A hero among the people during daylight, despite her foreign appearance against the tall elezen; A menace to temple knights during the cover of darkness, her face and body obscured by dark armor and a heavy broadsword strung across her back. She lived two lives simultaneously, two personas that would have otherwise clashed if they were ever fated to meet. It had confused Sidurgu at first, her ideals as a Dragoon in opposition to his goals as a Dark Knight. She didn't see the world in black and white like most, electing to instead view the world as it was. Nothing was ever as simple as right or wrong, he had recalled her saying. An ideal outlook that he predicted would break her.

"You can't fix everything." He remembered saying plainly, watching as her face was concealed by her helm, her mouth only slightly visible above her high collared armor.

"I can die trying at least." She had replied.

And so they trained. Night after night, week after week, Broadswords contesting each other as they fought, the heat of battle collecting in Sidurgu's chest as he pressed the Miqu'te further in her swordsmanship skills. Her physical abilities was lacking, notwithstanding the usual lengths Sidurgu would train alongside Fray. Her arms would give out far sooner than Sidurgu would break a sweat. No matter how hard he pushed her, she could only go so far with a claymore, a wall that frustrated her to no end.

"Your body isn't built for this."

She wouldn't stop, lunging at Sidurgu as the tip of the broadsword dug against the dirt. She grunted as she attempted to pull the sword over her head, instead failing as her arms wouldn't lift the weapon any higher than her waist. Sidurgu easily sidestepped the attempted attack, kicking his foot out to catch her ankle as she tumbled to the ground, chest heaving to catch her breath.

"That's never stopped me before." she hissed, her hands searching for the weapon that had fallen to her side. "Again, fight me again."

Her stubbornness, he found, rivaled his own. And so they trained, and Aunyx's competence in swordsmanship improved, though never reaching the level she desired. In contrast, her connection with the Dark Arts was strong, harnessing its power quickly as Sidurgu taught her everything he knew. Her attunement with the darkness surprised Sidurgu, as both he and Fray had struggled with the more abstract teachings of the darkness. Instead, she controlled its power with alarming skill, weaving it into her role not only as a Dark Knight, but as a Dragoon. Sidurgu had cautioned against this, stating that Ishgardians were hesitant and *downright fearful* about dark arts and the unknown, but that threat did little to stop Aunyx.

"It feels familiar." She had said, her Dark Knight crystal glittering in her hand as she looked over it. "It's a part of us I never knew existed."

"Us?" Sidurgu questioned.

"Well, I mean me, specifically. Us as in everyone, i guess. We all have darkness inside of us. It's how we use it that matters, I guess."

Sidurgu was shaken from his memory at the sound of Aunyx turning in her bed, muttering words he couldn't quite make out as they were drowned out by his thoughts. She quickly tossed and turned, her arm breaking free from the covers as her hands curled around the pillow at the head of the bed. She looked at peace, the first time he had seen her face relaxed all day. Her hair fell across her face in a disheveled fashion, her braid dislodged and gently tucked under her chin. She slept soundly, despite her constant movements and it was almost comical how small she looked in a regular sized bed- Miko'te were so damn small, something Sidurgu always forgot about until he encountered one that barely came up to his chest. Not to be underestimated though, he had learned. Aunyx was a renowned warrior, he had witnessed firsthand the damage she could inflict. Yet her face always reflected a sense of calmness, and warmth to it. Maybe that's why he had been so shocked at her current condition- it wasn't the face he had remembered. She never exuded the appearance of a cold, relentless warrior before. Why now? He felt a faint rush of heat to his face, realizing that he had been staring intently at her as she slept, before turning his attention back towards the fire, a hue of red stretching from the scales under his eyes. It was rude to stare, let alone when she was unaware and so vulnerable sleeping.

The memory he had recalled was gone now, his mind foggy as sleep began to overtake his body. His breathing slowed as he rested his head to the side, shutting his eyes again as he gave into his drowsiness.

# Flustered

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The room was cold when Aunyx awoke the following morning, her breath visible as her eyes adjusted to the unfamiliar setting around her. The fire must have died sometime during the night, she mused, slowly adjusting her eyes as the blurry room around her focused. The room was better lit in the early morning light, a sign that the storm had lessened its grip on the highlands. The cold air hit her exposed arms and she shivered as she turned onto her stomach to stretch, noting that the room was still silent. She had slept well, probably the best she had rested in weeks. Her conscious didn't feel as heavy and sluggish, although still notably slower than it usually was.

No voices echoing.

No Fray whispering his discontent.

Just her mind and thoughts, no one else.

Lamenting in the realization she couldn't stay in bed all day, her eyes scanned the room and quickly noticed that the chair in front of the fireplace was vacant, along with Sidurgu's armored breastplate and broadsword absent. Rielle was still in the bed next to hers, peacefully sleeping in a mess of blankets. Sidurgu had to be around, *somewhere*. He wouldn't dare leave Rielle unattended for too long. That, along with the fact he was still nursing his wounds, she realized that he would eventually return to their quarters.

And so Aunyx waited in silence, relishing the peace and quiet of the room as she sunk back into the warm embrace of her bed. She didn't know when she would be able to do this again; do absolutely nothing without any looming worries. It would be foolish to waste it. The wind had died down considerably from the night before as snowflakes gently stuck to the windowsill, collecting small wafts of snow. She watched for awhile, mesmerized as the white crystals floated gently to the rooftops of the buildings outside. For however awful snow was, it was pretty to look at from the comforts of a warm bed. It brought back such a strange sensation in Aunyx's chest.

Comfort. Familiarity. Bitterness. Heartache.

Yet it was the closest thing to home for her.

Coerthas could be nothing but home to her. She loathed the snow, the way her skin would shiver against the harsh winds as they blew from around every corner, the sensation of being chilled down to her bones as it blew right through her armor and clothes. But it was familiar...consistent. She knew what to expect around every turn and every street in Foundation. Predictability in her life since becoming a Warrior of Light had been fleeting, but here she felt like she had some sort of control over her life and actions. The scions had not been involved in the Dragonsong War, save for Alphinaud and Tataru. The others had been scattered across the realm following the aftermath in Ul'dah. It had just been her and a handful of Warriors of Light that had escaped the chaos, spread across the many districts in Ishgard helping with the war efforts.

It hadn't just been the years she had spent here that made it feel like home. Her time with Sidurgu and Rielle, though more often than not coupled with some sort of conflict, had brought her peace and reassurance. Even moreso regarding her connection with Fray. Aunyx had never outright explained the connection between herself and Fray, as she barely understood it herself, but a part of her felt at home with the two of them. Like she had known them for much longer. Her heart had ached for that feeling of familiarity during her travels. Now that she was back, despite the circumstances, her aether felt at peace again.

Rielle stirred awake, sitting up in her bed with a restless expression. She rubbed her eyes and yawned, her eyes wandering to the place Sidurgu had been the night before.

"I dunno know when he left, but I'm guessing he'll be back eventually." Aunyx spoke, sitting up in her bed as she sat crossed her legs. She wrapped her tail loosely over her thigh, flicking the furred tip back and forth as she rested on her arms on the covers in front of her. Rielle merely nodded, not needing to clarify who she was talking about.

"S'probably communing, that's what he normally does when he disappears in the mornings." Rielle yawned again. "He still doesn't like to do that with others around. I'm apparently distracting so he usually wanders off to do it if we aren't at home."



Ah, right. Communion. Aunyx's mind briefly flashed back to her short-lived encounter with Fray berating her on her lack of practice. She was sure Sidurgu would as well once they had reconvened in Foundation.

"Either that or he's still upset about yesterday." Rielle added with a frown. "He has every right to be upset with me, I know, but I didn't think he'd be this much of a chocobo's arse about it."

"You know it's because he cares for you, that's all."

Rielle's expression grew conflicted. "I know. But I just want to help, I feel like such a burden. I'm too young to work, and even if I could, Sid wouldn't let me. He provides for the both of us and I want to prove to him i'm not the young, timid child he took under his watch years ago."

*Oh gods, it was too early for this kind of conversation.*

Still, the topic was going to be brought up eventually, and it was better to get it out of the way while Sidurgu was absent. Aunyx pressed on. "Sidurgu is just worried for your wellbeing. You know he's not doing this to be spiteful, he's just...he's lost a lot of people he cares about and doesn't want to lose anyone else."

She knew that feeling all too well.

This was dangerous territory to stray into, Aunyx thought, especially since she had been away for so long. She was unsure how their relationship had changed, considering that Sidurgu had tried to avoid taking up a parental role for Rielle. He had said he had no business raising her as a parent would; a fact that Aunyx vehemently agreed would be disastrous, but the fact of the matter was Rielle had needed some sort of adult figure in her life to protect and raise her. He had kept her alive, obviously, so he had done something right in that regard. That and her magicks had visibly improved from the short fight Aunyx had witnessed yesterday. It was everything else Aunyx was uncertain of.

“I know, i’m just frustrated sometimes. I know I can help in some way, I practice conjury almost everyday. I read the books, gods, Sidurgu even took me to Gridania to learn more, but he won’t give me the chance to practice what I’ve learned, save for when he comes home bleeding and bruised. What good is practicing if i don’t get to actually use it?” Rielle’s voice carried a hint of frustration, before sighing. She felt like she had asked these questions over and over again without a resolution. She turned her attention back to Aunyx, who sat quietly as she listened intently to her woes. “Speaking of magick, I didn’t have a chance to look over you last night, I guess we were all too tired. I’d like to try healing your wounds, and some of your older ones if you’d let me try.”

-----

Sidurgu was convinced that there was no peace and quiet anywhere in this damn fortress. He had awoken early that morning before the sun had risen, his back stiff from sleeping upright in that worn out wooden chair. It also hadn’t helped that he had been restless that entire night- he had woken up several times, once again thanks to that damn chair. Giving in to his restlessness, Sidurgu had decided to find somewhere quiet away from Aunyx and Rielle to reflect and commune. He had tried his best to quietly slip his armor back on, but the two had slept through all of the noises and whispered curses as he fought to strap his breastplate on in the dark. Managing to slip out of the room undetected, he now had wandered the many floors of the camp’s various buildings looking for a place to commune without the interruption of unwanted guests.

It had taken him several tries (he had 2 separate incidences of startled Fortemps guards wandering into unoccupied rooms he had attempted to use) before he had found a secluded staircase on the backside of a building. Though outside the perimeter of the busy building, the stairs had fresh, undisturbed snowfall resting on it’s steps, a sign that the area was not patrolled regularly. As long as it was quiet, Sidurgu wouldn’t mind the cold. The storm had moved through the valley as quickly as it descended, and the only sign of its passing were lingering snow falls that gently fell around the plains. They would be able to head back with Ishgard with little problem today, a thought that made Sidurgu audibly sigh with relief. The sooner they could get out of the camp and head to the comfort and familiarity of home, the better.

The doubt that plagued his mind now was Aunyx. Would she move onto another city-state? Had she been merely passing through the area? His chest tightened slightly. It didn’t feel like it had been two years since she had left, but her wandering back into their lives felt...

It had left Sidurgu feeling like he had been punched in the throat.

He fiddled with his job crystal, turning it over and over again between his armored fingers as he tried to concentrate on the flame stirring within his chest. Usually communion came easy to him, after the many years of practicing the art. Today, however, his mind was filled with too many conflicting thoughts and worries. A rumble of frustration reverberated in his chest as he inhaled deeply and tried to push all those thoughts away, if only momentarily.

It had worked, as he felt the edges of his vision blur and darken, a wave of stillness drowning out the soft sounds of the camp around him. The sensation was comforting as he slipped farther into the abyss, aware now that he had successfully blocked out all of the shallow thoughts from moments earlier.

There he stood in a landscape shrouded in darkness, his breath steady as his soul ebbed and flowed against the abyss. It spread slow at first, before encompassing every part of him. While it normally was a calm and gentle embrace, this time it felt more reserved, as if it was holding back.

*You're troubled.* It seemed to say, thought Sidurgu knew well enough the abyss could not speak.

He wanted to reply back, but it was foolish to talk back to something that wasn't, well, tangible. The darkness circled him, the faint traces of darkened smoke floating in the air. He reached out with an open palm, letting the smoke slip through his plated fingers. Normally, Communion helped clear his mind, not make it an even more mangled mess of thoughts. A cluttered mind made communing difficult, and his mind was filled to the brim with questions and concerns. Worry, as well, as his mind momentarily flashed an image of Aunyx.

That all but broke his communion, the edges of his vision lightening and coming back into focus. The scene around him returned to the landscapes of Coerthas, the hum of the knights working filling his horns. He sat there, unmoved for a few minutes, allowing his body to adjust to the environment around him again. He had hoped for a longer communion, but he knew better than to try and force it.

Sidurgu stood from his seat on the stone steps and paused for a moment before slinging deathbringer across his back and starting off back towards their room in the camp's main bunkhouse. The snowfall had slowed considerably from when he had left the room, a sign

that made Sidurgu even more eager to head out for the Gates of Judgement. The storm had subsided, but Coerthas was known for having storms move in right after another. It was time to go home before they got stuck here for another round of gales and blowing ice.

As he made his way back towards the room, Sidurgu tried his best to avoid the many guards that roamed the camp. Surely Emmanellain had given his men a heads up on the 7 foot tall au ra that was currently staying in the camp, but he didn't want to test that theory out considering the shocked guards he had already run into earlier that morning. The less attention he attracted the better. Thankfully, his walk back to the room was uneventful.

That was until he opened the room to be greeted by a nearly topless Aunyx, her back almost completely void of clothes save for the small garment wrapped around her chest. His eyes locked onto a large scar that encompassed her upper back before he realized *he shouldn't be seeing this at all*. His fingers struggled to find the door knob as he tried to turn away before he saw anything else, trying to hide the flustered expression he knew was spreading across his face.

"Fury, where the fuck are your clothes." Sidurgu quickly slammed the door and faced away from the exposed miqote sitting on the edge of the chair. He was now awkwardly standing face first in one of the corners in the room, avoiding all eye contact with either Rielle or Aunyx.

"If you had told us where you were going you wouldn't have walked in on us as I was inspecting her injuries." Rielle giggled, fully aware of the embarrassment that Sidurgu was currently experiencing. "Oh come on, you've seen way more skin when we visited Costa Del Sol."

"That is- this is different!" Sidurgu lashed out, still not turning around to face the two. Rielle would never let him live it down if she saw how red his face had become, despite the venomous glare he wore trying to fight the embarrassment.

"Neither of us knew when you were going to come back, Rielle thought it would be better to check my injuries before we headed back to the Crozier." Aunyx spoke calmly, though she herself could feel a warm sensation rising into her cheeks. While she was never one to shy away from more revealing outfits in time away from her usual duties, she had never been this exposed in front of Sidurgu before. Most of her days spent in Ishgard she had been outfitted in heavy leathers and metals, not thin clothes that exposed her skin to the elements. Their

time together was spent dispatching Temple Knights and journeying across Eorzea with Rielle in tow, not leisuring around.

“We’re almost done, just let me finish this last spell. I can’t get rid of scars, but I can lessen the scar tissue and make it more comfortable for you, hopefully.” Rielle pressed her open palm onto Aunyx’s shoulder blade, releasing a glowing pulse that spread over the miqote’s fair skin. It was true that there was little Rielle could do for the many scars that littered Aunyx’s skin, but the pain associated with the layers of damaged tissue could be lessened. As for the fresh scar that encompassed Aunyx’s back, Rielle had tried her best to heal the injury but had barely been able to close the wound where it had been slightly reopened during the fight with Safat.

“I’ve done all I can, that should make things easier to move around.” Rielle retracted her hand and placed it in her lap, watching as Aunyx flexed and twisted around.

It did feel better, malms better than before. Any lingering tightness had been removed under Rielle’s steady hand, save for the wound that she had sustained from the falling Garlean shrapnel. Aunyx reached for her bonewiccan top and pulled her arms through the sleeves, tightening the various ties of the top around her waist. The cloth had seen much better days, she noted as her hand dragged around the fraying edges at the waist band. A shame, this had been one of her favorite articles of armor she had picked up in Doma. The metals adorning the armor although scratched, still glistened with a metal sheen.

“You can stop sulking in the corner now, I’m dressed.” Aunyx had to admit it was a sight to see Sidurgu so...flustered? She would never have expected him to be so easily ruffled over something so trivial. She stood up from her seat at the bedside, adjusting her armor and clothes as they draped off her body.

“The storm’s subsided enough to head back to Ishgard, We should leave soon to avoid any more delays.” Sidurgu tried to regain his composure as he leaned against the wall. Both Rielle and Aunyx were dressed in their usual attire, appearing to have gotten ready while he had been out of the room.

“One might think you don’t enjoy the company of Temple guards.” Aunyx teased, knowing Sidurgu’s displeasure of being in close proximity to the elezen guards.

Sidurgu glared back at her. “I’ve had my fill of them to last me a lifetime, but no, I want to get back to something more comfortable than this shack Emmalellian was kind enough to give us for the night.”

“Would you have rather slept outside in the blizzard?”

“Probably.” He uncrossed his arms and pulled himself off of the wall. His eyes shifted to the fading daylight outside. Winter days were rough- the sun was already beginning to set and it was barely noon. “We should leave before we lose anymore daylight.”

Aye, they should.

“Lead the way then.” Aunyx replied, gathering her lance and helmet from the side table.

## Chapter End Notes

Big transition chapter.

Out of curiosity do people want me to include more explicit content in this (Smut, I'm talking about smut LOL) in this fic or would you prefer it be posted as separate/optional reading? I'm leaning towards including it since you all know its gonna HAPPEN but i dunno if i want to make it a separate thing.

Thanks for the kudos and bookmarks!! <3

# Hearth

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The group had left camp earlier that afternoon, setting off towards the Gates of Judgement. Though the wind had driven the snowfall into tall snow drifts dotted along the trail, the worn cobblestone path to the Coerthan city had been easy to traverse. The restful night, at least for Aunyx and Rielle, had helped immensely to brighten their expressions and outlook. Sidurgu, Aunyx had noticed, looked like he hadn't slept well. Sleeping upright in a chair in chainmail would do that to someone though, she thought. Aunyx had set her Falcon loose after retrieving it from the stables, its glowing ruby wings disappearing into the clouds overhead as they moved west. She could call the mount back at any time with her whistle, a skill she had trained the bird to do during her many long trips through crowded cities. The falcon could enjoy the freedom of the skies and wind through its feathers while still staying close by in case it was needed. Aunyx silently prayed that wouldn't be necessary. Though her body and mind felt rejuvenated, none of them were in any condition to fight off any would be attackers or monsters.

The three had faced no opposition from the guards at the gate, ushering them through as the sun set behind the jagged peaks to the west. Making their way across the snow-encrusted bridge, Aunyx was surprised to see the city so crowded as they approached the aetheryte at the base of the city. Despite the fading daylight the streets of Foundation were filled with people, many of them going about their usual schedules unaware of group's arrival. They made their way through the bustling streets and up the winding walkway to the higher levels of the city, Aunyx noting that reconstruction on the city had made considerable progress in her absence. The city had been in disrepair from the war when she had first set foot in the city as a ward of House Fortemps; a result of the century old war waging against the dragons. Buildings located in the brume and lower levels had been destroyed by flames and various dragon attacks and left desolate in their wake, as the city turned its attention on protecting the highborn citizens living above the poverty-stricken district. In their place now stood new structures, all in different stages of completion. While chaos had loomed elsewhere in the world, Ishgard had begun anew with a politically stable cabinet of officials. Aunyx paused in front of the charred remains of a building, the entrance obscured with construction barriers and shuttered windows. A much more familiar sight. Well, an entire city couldn't be rebuilt overnight.

Rielle and Sidurgu had walked ahead of Aunyx, though as she quickened her step towards them she caught a glimpse of Sidurgu looking at her from over his shoulder. Their eyes met for a moment, words unspoken, before Sidurgu broke his gaze. Nothing had to be said between them; her secrecy and false sunny disposition, although it worked fairly well on

Rielle, would not fare as well against Sidurgu. It was only a matter of time until he brought it up, she knew. At least, for now, it seemed he wasn't interested in disputing her web of lies.

The group made their way up towards the Crozier, an even bigger crowd of people appearing as they moved closer to the markets. Despite the narrow walkways weaving through the stalls and vendors, the crowd spread as Sidurgu appeared, some whispering behind his back, others cautiously eyeing him as he passed. None uttered a word to him, though it was clear that the ishgardians were still apprehensive about the au ra knight. Rielle walked behind him, and Aunyx followed closely behind her. The people paid little attention to her; she had elected to wear her helmet into the city to avoid being recognized. While outsiders of different races were still rarely seen within the province, let alone the city, Aunyx did not stand out the same way Sidurgu did- her ears were pinned closely to her head, making it difficult to make them out against her unruly wine-colored locks. Her tail swayed behind her as well, though her short stature made it almost impossible to see her tail from elezen height. She blended in well, or as well as any mercenary would in a crowd adorning leather clothes and plated gauntlets. It seemed, from her observations however, that more adventurers had made their way to the now open city to search for work.

"Ishgard is really promoting hiring outside mercenaries huh?" Aunyx Whispered, falling into stride next to Rielle. "I've never seen so many non-elezens in the markets before."

"Aymeric initiated new regulations regarding for-hire adventurers looking for work in Ishgard. It was slow at first, but once people caught on about the pay, everyone wanted to come. I don't think even Aymeric guessed how many people would come looking for jobs. It's been a mess, Sidurgu used to be the only mercenary, outside the guards, that would take the more dangerous Hunt Marks, but it's been more competitive as of late." The Elezen looked around, noting the various hunters that were huddling around the market board. "It's been worse lately since the monsters have been few and far between. Sidurgu has been going out less for marks, there just aren't as many monsters coming into the highlands. Or any that cause a real threat.

"You would think Sid would be happy about working less, but it's been the opposite. He's grumpier than usual most days. He's taken up more lucrative leves, but he's not the best at handling homestead tasks." Rielle smirked, after checking that Sidurgu was out of horn's range.

"That doesn't surprise me at all." Aunyx chuckled, knowing full well how Sidurgu wasn't suited for more casual quests. He was skilled with a broadsword and cutting down



enemies, not so much at helping others find lost livestock or gathering botanicals for surgeons.

“I tried to get him to help the moogles at moghome, but he said, word for word, that he’d rather chew off his own tail than help out those furry shites.”

Aunyx didn’t have time to cover her mouth as she let out a snort of laughter, causing Sidurgu to glance behind him at the two trailing behind him. Rielle smiled, noting that it was nice to see Aunyx in a more relaxed state. She had showed some unusual behavior after yesterday’s fight, but now it seemed she was back to normal. The two continued their chatter, Aunyx asking Rielle about her healing and what else she had missed in her time away from them. It didn’t take long for them to arrive in the darkened alley, stopping outside a well-worn door as Sidurgu searched for the key. The Crozier could still be heard from around the corner, but the sound was dampened by snow that had collected on the ground of the narrow walkway. The home’s entrance was inconspicuous and off the beaten path, something that Rielle hated and Sidurgu loved.

Sidurgu reached into the small compartment at his waist and pulled out a worn silver key, inserted it into the lock, and twisted it until he heard a faint tick. Rielle quickly slipped under Sidurgu’s arm that rested on the now open door, shuffling and disappearing into the dark entryway. He propped the door open farther, eyeing Aunyx as she followed Rielle under his plated arm. She couldn’t see anything in the pitchblack room, save for the faint light that filtered through a window above the doorway. Besides that, Aunyx could only make out where Rielle was by the sound of her boots scuffing across the floorboards. Sidurgu stepped into the living area and shut the door behind him with a loud bang, and then the click of the lock engaging. Sidurgu had barely entered the room before he began to shed the layers of armor he wore and let them fall to the ground with loud clangs and bangs. Much more gently, he leaned Deathbringer against the wall closest to the door as he unbuckled the red straps that held his breastplate in place.

“You could’ve left the door open until we found wood for the fire.” Rielle called out, her faint outline illuminated by the only light source available in the room. Her arms were full of timber and logs, as she made her way back into the room, though Aunyx could hardly tell where she was as her voice bounced off the bare walls.

“S’cold.” Was all Sidurgu said as Rielle began to arrange the logs in the hearth, lighting the tinder with a flint. The flames were small, producing more smoke than heat at first before eventually grew into a roaring fire. As the flames consumed more fuel, the home filled with the faint smell of burning sap and pine. The three worked in silence as they removed their outer armor and layers from their bodies, the floor drenched in melting snow that had found its way into the folds of their clothes and boots. Finally, they all sat down near the fire in

much more comfortable clothes, soaking in the heat as it cracked and splintered in the bed of coals.

The day had caught up to them all and Aunyx could feel the exhaustion slipping into her muscles the more she relaxed. Judging from the silence from the group, they had felt the same. Her mind was lulled into a dangerously close state of falling asleep right there on the couch before it sprang back to life. She had almost forgotten. Reaching for her knapsack she pulled out the hefty bag of gil and placed it on the table in front of Sidurgu, who sat directly across from her in another chair.

“Almost forgot, here is the Hunt bounty. I wanted to wait until we were back in Foundation to give it to you.”

Sidurgu glanced down at the sack of money with a perplexed glare before looking back up at Aunyx. “You helped kill it, half of it’s yours.” He crossed his arms and leaned back in the chair.

She shook her head. “I don’t need it, it’s your mark. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time.”

“And that means you’re entitled to half of the gil.”

“I told you, I don’t want it. *Take it.*” She pushed the pouch closer to the edge of the table.

“Just take it Sid, she’s not going to let it go.” Rielle piped up from her corner of the couch she had curled up into, her legs pulled up to her chest as she watched the two bicker.

The two waited in silence. Finally, Sidurgu let out an exhausted sigh, and hastily pulled the bag towards himself before slipping it into the pocket of pants.

Sidurgu removed his attention from Aunyx and shifted it towards Rielle. “Shouldn’t you be in bed?”

Nodding sheepishly with a slight pout, Rielle uncoiled her legs and began to head towards her room for the night. She paused as she reached the corner of the living room and turned around, looking at Aunyx with hopeful eyes.

“You’re gonna stick around for awhile, right? No sneaking off in the middle of the night without saying goodbye?”

Aunyx’s heart sank at the elezen’s words. That is what she had done last time. The miqote flashed a soft expression. “I’ll be sticking around awhile, yeah.”

“I’m glad to hear, I’ll see you in the morning.” Rielle’s face beamed, looking at the two before disappearing behind the corner. Her footsteps became faint before the sound of the door closed behind her, leaving Aunyx alone with Sidurgu.

They sat apart from each other, neither of them saying a word. Aunyx sat crossed legged on the couch, her hands resting neatly in her lap as she contemplated how to break the silence. Sidurgu was propped up in the chair closer to the first place, his eyes shut as if he was sleeping. It wasn’t that she didn’t *like* the silence; if anything it was a welcome change from the usual string of questions being brought down upon her from the scions. It only felt wrong because she knew that Sidurgu had to have questions about why she was really here.

“I...”She stammered, deciding that it was better to start talking and hope that the words would come to her as she went. She wasn’t even sure if Sidurgu was listening.

Sidurgu, still leaning back in his chair, didn’t bother to open his eyes before interrupting. “If you wanted to talk about it, you would have told me already.”

Aunyx sat up and straightened her posture. *So he was awake.* Her disposition had shifted from the earlier light-hearted mood, and now she felt the weight of her circumstances beginning to build again on her shoulders. “I wouldn’t have told you sooner, I didn’t want to worry Rielle.”

He gave a dry, soft laugh. “You already did when you stopped replying to her mail.”

“I couldn’t. I mean, I wanted to reply but...we didn’t have much time to tell anyone where we were going when we left for Kugane. I didn’t know how quickly mail would have even reached Ishgard, let alone if we were being tracked by the Garleans. I didn’t want a paper trail that lead back to here, to you and Rielle. You have been through enough already...”

“You left in a hurry last time without a word to Rielle, I think you owe her more of an apology than me.”

Sidurgu was right. She had left Ishgard in such a rush, barely mentioning it to Sidurgu as she hastily handed him her house key and told him to take care of it in her absence. She had left supplies, armor, weapons, everything once word had reached her regarding the whereabouts of Illberd and his plans of treachery at the Ala Mhigan border. There had been no time to hesitate. And that had been the last time she had seen Sidurgu and Rielle.

“She’s grow up a lot since I left. She’s taller than me now.” Aunyx avoided Sidurgu’s gaze as she stared at her lap. “A lot has changed. Not just her, everywhere. When I crossed over the sea back to Eorzea, it felt so *different*. ”

“It’s still the same shithole you left, just with a fresh coat of lacquer and paint. And more adventurers looking for a quick coin.” He huffed. His eyes were open now, the bright blue limbal rings in his irises vibrant against the dark backdrop of the room. Sidurgu wasn’t nuanced in these sort of conversations. He hated when Rielle would get angry and scream at him, but at least he knew how to respond to anger and hate. Aunyx looked downright despondent, appearing weak sitting on the couch across from him.

“I’m not going to interrogate you; all that matters is your back. This chair is comfortable enough for me, you can take your room back until you decide to leave.” He closed his eyes again, sinking deeper into the chair he occupied. Aunyx opened her mouth to refuse his offer but was cut off quickly as Sidurgu continued to speak.

“It’s a fair trade for the gil you gave me for the hunt. If you don’t sleep there, that’s your own choice. But I won’t either.”

Aunyx knew she would not win the argument, and frankly she reveled in the thought of sleeping in a warm bed again. “It’s getting late, I suppose we should get some rest.”

Aunyx unfolded herself from the warm seat she had made noting, that the fire was already beginning to die as the coals burned softer in the fireplace. The heat would hopefully linger until she was able to fall asleep, as she was unsure how much Sidurgu had changed the room to his liking while she had been away.

“G’night, Sidurgu.” She spoke before grabbing the knapsack at the base of the couch, turning around and heading towards the ajar opening of her former room. He gave a soft grunt before turning his attention towards the remaining embers of the fire.

Aunyx gently shut the door behind her and turned to face the contents of the room. It looked almost identical to the day she had left; the only difference was the bed had been pushed up against the far wall and a workbench covered in stray strips of leather and metal brackets now occupied the wall closest to the door. It was almost like she had never left. She quickly slipped out of her top, as she had worn it under her armor for several days now, and pulled on a much longer shirt over her head as she prepared to slip into the bed. It had not been made, the sheets and heavy blankets skewed around the mattress and some across the floor. She hesitated for a moment before slipping under its covers. It smelled faintly of smoke and leather, something that shouldn’t have surprised her considering it had been Sidurgu’s bed after all. Her body nuzzled into the sheets, taking in a deep breath of the smell before she realized what she was doing. It was entirely embarrassing really, the smell being so comforting and familiar to her. The bed, while not as soft as some of her past accommodations, would do the trick for the time being.

For now, she was safe. There had been no sign of anyone following her since her departure from Ala Mhigo, a wave of relief washing over her as she had meticulously covered her tracks since leaving the northern province. Now that she had unexpectedly met up with Rielle and Sidurgu, she had to be even more careful about concealing her whereabouts. While being discovered by the scions would result in an uncomfortable reunion, she worried more about Garlean insurgents stalking her, even this far away from the battlefield. More importantly, that blonde-haired zealot had managed to track her to the edge of the world before. The thought of Zenos made the hair on her neck stand stiff, his murderous eyes burned into her memory like a scar that wouldn’t fade no matter how hard she tried to shake herself from the thought. She felt her pulse rise as she envisioned him cutting through the scions. Through other Warriors of Light like they were pieces of paper in the wind.

She wouldn't be able to face herself if they had followed her to Ishgard. Sidurgu and Rielle had experienced so much pain, so much loss, Aunyx couldn't stand the thought of dragging them into something that didn't concern them. She wouldn't allow it. She had time, she could still protect them. *It was her job, damnnit* . She was a Warrior of Light; she wouldn't let Zenos hurt anyone else again.

Fatigue began to ease the intense fear that had sunk into every crevice of her mind as her body began to become numb with weariness. Her eyelids felt heavy as she burrowed against the sheets, and it wasn't long until she drifted off to sleep.

## Chapter End Notes

Yo Stormblood was such a lucid dream for me i had to go back and remember what the heck happened at the beginning of that expac LOLLL

# Steady

## Chapter Summary

“When’s the last time you sparred?” It was more of a statement than a question.

The days following their return to the city were uneventful- and Sidurgu hadn’t questioned Aunyx any further, much to her relief. The trio laid low after their return from the hunt, resting from it’s accompanied injuries and usual weariness from traveling. Their lingering wounds and fatigue just needed time and rest to fully mend, something that took longer than it should have considering Sidurgu’s aversion to relaxing. Sidurgu and Aunyx stayed inside the home most days, few words shared between them. Though both parties were initially relieved to see one another, awkwardness crept into each other's interactions with one another. Short of the short conversation they had upon returning to Ishgard, neither had engaged in any length of conversation besides acknowledging one another and short, one word replies. Rielle, instead of addressing the growing morbol in the room, had decided to instead venture out into the cold market to find something to bring back for dinner on the third day.

It was Sidurgu who finally broke the silence that was growing between them. Sidurgu had startled her at first; she had been sitting on the floor of the room sorting through her bag and arranging her items around the room. He leaned against the door frame, wearing a loose black shirt with his arms crossed.

“When’s the last time you sparred?” It was more of a statement than a question.

“You’re asking me that when you know I came from Ala Mhigo?” She raised her eyebrow, questioning the Xaela with a hint of annoyance. She paused momentarily from her belongings and stood up, matching Sidurgu’s pose with crossed arms. Even standing straight up, the tips of her ears just barely met at the Xaela’s chest, almost 2 feet of difference between the two.

“I mean with something other than your lance.”

In that case, it had been awhile. There had been little time to practice with anything but her lance in the many months traveling. She carried little in the way of extra weapons during her journey- the extra weight would have been more of a burden.

“I don’t have extra armor or a greatsword on me.” Actually, the last place she had even set eyes on her armor it had been-

Sidurgu huffed, a smirk flashing across his face before it disappeared. “You dropped all your gear here before you left, it should be everything you need.” his head motioned to the corner of the living room. Aunyx took a step around Sidurgu, her eyes following to where he had motioned- a well-worn, wrapped cloth sat upright in the nook beside the door.

“You never moved it.” Her voice had been much softer than she anticipated. She knew without unwrapping the item what it was. There it had sat, Aunyx figured, unmoved for almost two years.

“The rest of the gear is in the room, Probably buried under spare armor and tools, but it should be in good shape.”

It was like Aunyx didn’t hear him as she moved towards the corner of the room, her hand brushing across the dusty cloth as she unraveled it’s contents. The sword still shone as brilliantly as the day she had wrapped it in it’s cover, though the dust had settled on the hilt that had been exposed. She marveled momentarily at the weapon- She had forgotten how beautiful and slender the weapon was. It had been one of her last purchases before embarking to the east- a custom sword made to her measurements with the finest steel this side of the Coerthan mountains. Sidurgu had initially scoffed at the small blade- the length was still considerably long when compared against the miqote’s physique, but the blade itself had been narrower than previous swords she had equipped. She couldn’t wield enormous swords like Sidurgu and Fray, but she could be just as deadly with a smaller blade.

“Aren’t we supposed to be resting?” She ran a finger against the blade, minding herself as she brushed against the cold steel with fingertips dangerously close to the edge. She heard Sidurgu dryly chuckle behind her. She knew what his answer would be.

“Rielle won’t know.” Sidurgu had already moved from his position in the doorway, chainmail rattle as he slipped his breastplate over his clothes. “Besides, it’d be nice to see



what you've picked up from your time away. The drunks at the Forgotten Knight always catch wind of the scion's movements, but I'd like to see firsthand what you're capable of these days."

"Was my performance with Safat not good enough to satiate your interest?" Her tone dripped with sarcasm, well aware that Sidurgu was looking for any excuse to get out of the house and stretch his muscles.

"I'd rather see what you can do one on one instead of against an overgrown lizard." The buckles snapped securely on the plates and frayed fabric that hung from his waist. In the time they had been home he had beaten the dents out of his pauldron, though the puncture holes still remained from where Safat had struck.

"Aren't you an overgrown lizard though?" Aunyx continued, feeling the awkward silence between them melting away. His glare was telling enough. "Fine, too far, I get it. But wouldn't it be better to use my usual gear?"

"Where's the fun in that." Sidurgu had finished slipping on his last gauntlet, flexing his fingers to make sure all the armor plates slid easily between one another. He swung Deathbringer over his shoulder, his blue eyes now directed at her.

"Well?"

-----

She remembered why she had preferred her maiming armor over fending. The weight of the pauldrons sat heavy on her shoulders as she moved precariously towards the open door. Everything felt so tight on her, compared to the mixture of flexible cloth and armor that she was so well accustomed to. It wasn't that the armor didn't fit- she had gotten custom armor made to her measurements due to the lack of miqo'tes in Ishgard- but the armor was foreign to her after many years of neglect.

She gingerly moved towards the door as she allowed her body to become accustomed to the armor, grabbing her broadsword before stepping out onto the steps of the alley. The morning

light trickled down to the pavement in small sunrays as the two moved along the empty street. In the distance Aunyx could hear people moving about the marketplace, though the crowd had to be much smaller than the evening they had returned.

“The Brume’s being rebuilt but the usual place we’d practice still hasn’t been demolished yet.” Sidurgu made small talk as the two descended down into the city, through various turns and side streets. At first she assumed they were avoiding templar knights- but in reality they were making sure to avoid any encounter with Rielle on her errands. No telling how she would react seeing both of them, full clad in armor, carrying weapons, and probably up to no good doing so. “No idea how long it’ll be there though, so make use of it while you can.”

“I don’t think I’ll be wandering through the brume alone, despite the restoration it’s still seems-” Aunyx ducked under a stray beam that was lodged between two buildings, still following Sidurgu as he led the way. She made careful, calculated steps as she balanced on the uneven debris as the two moved closer to their destination, until one rock slipped from beneath her heel, sending her tumbling forward. She involuntarily squeaked as she crashed into Sidurgu’s back, Deathbringer’s sharp edge narrowly avoiding her cheek. Despite the sudden weight on his back, Sidurgu did not stumble forward and instead stayed unmoved as the miqo’té righted her balance. He glanced over his shoulder, noting the frustration worn across her face.

“The brume is safer than it used to be. You should have seen it when Fray and I would wander after Ompagne would tire of our arguing and bickering indoors.” He pointed out, addressing her comment before she had slid into him. He was well aware of the ungraceful movement she was exhibiting from the moment they had left the house. If one were to guess off her current movement that this was the same miqo’té that had gracefully descended from the sky and weaved through a battlefield as if it were a dance, they would’ve guessed wrong. “Besides, I wouldn’t want to be the poor bastard that tried to pickpocket the Warrior of Light. Watch your step.”

“Sorry.” She muttered as she pushed passed him, her eyes glued to the uneven terrain beneath her.

The rest of the walk to the abandoned structure was quiet, Aunyx focusing instead on her feet to avoid stumbling again. If she could barely make her way across unstable ground she already dreaded how sparring was going to go.

They arrived outside the crumbling building, its entrance obscured by tattered cloth and a small opening to slide between. Once inside, Aunyx glanced around the interior at the deteriorated space. Many of the brick columns had been displaced and eroded, the second story of the building long gone from a dragon siege. It had been used by members of the brume to shelter from the wicked winds outside, but even then it looked like it had been abandoned for better accommodations. The open floor plan and lack of proximity to the rest of the brume's inhabitants made it the perfect arena to train, however. Her metal sabatons echoed with each step against the stone floor as she moved further into the building, the once smooth stone now cracked and shattered from raining debris.

"You can imagine why they want to rebuild it." Sidurgu's eyes studying the building as Aunyx moved across the room several malms in front of him. "It has a nice view of the freljord on a clear day; Not that there are many of those anymore."

It was hard to imagine the Brume as a desirable place to live, she thought. Aunyx had only ever known it as a desolate waste for those not born into wealthy families; those with the misfortune of being born to the wrong parents many would say. For as long as the Dragonsong War had raged, it had been an easy target for the beasts to lay their fire and rage to the defenseless Ishgardians below the canons of the high city walls. It was pointless to rebuild when Ishgard couldn't defend it- and so it had fallen to squalor.

*It wasn't always like that,* Fray's voice cut abruptly into her mind.

Memories of the place flooded her, some that didn't belong. She could feel a distance Fray meandering through her thoughts, his memories beginning to mix with hers. She could faintly recall a memory of herself- *no, of Fray* - standing in the halls of the building with a much younger Sidurgu not far behind. Aunyx could almost feel the adrenaline of the memories flow through her, the sweat on her brow as blade clashed loudly against each other. The Brume had looked much different in that memory- no snow or ice stuck to the building's exterior. The memory had to be from before the calamity, when the hills and valleys of Coerthas had been prairieland and vast open fields of grass and green as far as the eye could see. A time before the cold had sunk its claws into the land. The moment was fleeting, before she regained composure.

Sidurgu had already removed his weapon from behind his back, eyeing the miqo'te with intense, bright limbal rings. His expression had sharpened, posed as if he was a panther hunting his prey. His fingers flexed around the hilt as he shifted back onto his back leg, drawing the blade into a defensive stance.

Aunyx followed his lead, pulling her broadsword over her shoulder and curling her armored fingers around the weapon. It felt much heavier than her lance and her balance was off as she momentarily struggled to find the sweet spot for gripping the hilt. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, the connection between her aether and the soul crystal around her neck strengthening as she took a brief pause and readied herself. Her eyes slowly opened, at first focusing on the tip of the blade in front of her before shifting to meet Sidurgu's piercing blue eyes. Her pupil's retracted in the dark light, now small black slits that contrasted with her deep purple irises.

"I hope you still know how to use that blade." He scoffed, remaining in his position as he readied for Aunyx to strike first.

She took the opening- leaping forward with a slightly strained grunt as she pulled the blade to her side, charging her ability as she moved closer to Sidurgu. She swung the blade around, the deep purple flames growing around the weapon as it rapidly moved towards the Xaela's torso. He quickly parried the attack with his sword's edge, flints of embers emitting as the two swords made contact. He had barely flinched at the impact of her attack, instead pushing her away with one quick movement of Deathbringer. Aunyx was pushed back several feet, stumbling to catch her footing. Sidurgu spun his sword around with ease, before slicing the air with one cleave. The attack emitted a deep red and burgundy aura that moved towards the miko'te with alarming speed, giving her only a few moments to activate the dark shield around her body. The shield held as the attack moved over her body, the heat of the flames dancing over her armor.

"You're still too slow." Sidurgu had taken the brief distraction to close the gap between the two of them. To his surprise, Aunyx had already predicted his movement and had firmly placed her hand on his breastplate, releasing an abyssal drain into the au ra's aether.

He grunted as the ability seeped into the aether surrounding his body, a fierce pain beginning to emerge. It felt as if his blood vessels were being contacted, slowing cutting off the flow of aether from his core. He buckled to 1 knee, heavily breathing as he steadied himself with his blade.

"That was...a good one." He panted, looking out from beneath his unruly white hair at his opponent. She was unmoved from her position though now her expression had softened into a more concerned appearance.

“Was that too much?” Aunyx hesitated as Sidurgu regained his composure as the effect wore off. She raised her blade as Sidurgu stood up and returned to his tactical stance.

In truth, his breathing was still shallow- he hadn’t expected her to use that ability so suddenly after engaging her shield- it took an immense amount of aether to conjure an entire shield for a body; to have enough left over for an offensive attack was unusual, at least it had been for her previously. Though she had left her weapon and armor in Ishgard, her attack had proven that she had been practicing. He could feel a disturbance in her power though, an untamed flame that grew dangerously close to the surface. It’s flame was erratic, he could sense, as if it had been left to its own for far too long. He concentrated back to the fight at hand- he could ask her about it later.

“No, it’s fine. I shouldn’t have underestimated your aether control.” Taking deep breaths, Sidurgu felt his breathing returning to normal. “Keep going.” Aunyx shifted back to her fighting stance as he steadily raised his blade to continue their sparring match.

The two continued to fight, the metallic noises of their blades echoing off the stone interior walls and rubble as they clashed. Though they were both fresh from battle, the heat building in Sidurgu’s chest threatened to break free from it’s confines with every swing and parry. Sparring was something he had sorely missed in the time of Fray’s absence. The skirmishes while training Aunyx had been fun, but nothing had come close to the raw and unbound spars that Sidurgu had experienced with Fray. Fray had never held back, often pushing Sidurgu to his limits, only stopping once neither of them could muster the strength to raise their swords. It had been a long time since he had traded blows with someone similar skill to his own.

Finally, Aunyx’s labored gasps for air broke free from her chest, a thick layer of sweat covering her fair skin as her body hit it’s limit. Her leg’s could barely hold herself upright as she positioned her sword in the ground firmly using it to hold her body weight up. Loose, burgundy hair strands stuck to her face as she struggled to catch her breath, fingers shaking as she pushed her bangs out of her eyes.

Sidurgu was in a similar state, his wispy hair flattened from sweat as it clung around the scales framing his face. Noting Aunyx’s submission of defeat, he stabbed the end of his sword into the exposed ground below him as he unbuckled some of the straps holding his plated armor in place. The abrupt feeling of cool air hit his pale skin as he removed one of his gauntlets. He felt like he was burning up, though the feeling was welcomed.

“You’ve gotten better.” Sidurgu managed to say in between breaths, though his voice was lower and almost a growl. He was satisfied with the match despite wanting it to go on longer. Continuing in their state would only lead to real injuries. Though the spar had been intense, both had held back to some degree, neither wanting to inflict real injury upon the other. They would be tired, yes, but no new wounds to nurse.

“Thanks, still not good enough to beat you though.” Aunyx’s expression softened as she stood up, her ears pinned back affectionately. Though still weary from her injuries from both Ala Mhigo and Safat, she knew even in her best shape that she was no match for Sidurgu in a friendly sparr, let alone a real fight. He still had brute strength over her, something that could never be overcome with more training. Years ago that bothered her. Now, not so much.

Sidurgu couldn’t help but smirk. First, from the unintended compliment that Aunyx had let slip out about their fight; secondly from his unfaltering gaze he broke once he realized he was staring. Despite being covered in sweat and debris, her aura and presence alone was enough for him to momentarily let his guard down. He grimaced as the thought crossed his mind. The way she fought, how their blades met in a flurry of steel, the way she conjured her aether control with such ease. It brought an uneasy flutter to his stomach and chest.

He had experienced the same thing with Fray.

But she was not Fray.

She was her own person. A separate entity from the Soul crystal she carried with her, memories wrapped in the dark red gem that hung around her neck. It was hard to not see some of Fray’s mannerisms in the way she fought, the way she would sometimes say things. The fiery passion she had for protecting those who needed it the most. It was haunting, but so familiar. So *painfully* familiar. In her absence from Ishgard, it had been the thing Sidurgu had longed for the most. It was selfish for him to feel this way towards her. It was entirely selfish for him to want that feeling of familiarity again. It wouldn’t be the same, he knew all too well, but he longed for it nonetheless.

He was torn from that thought as the sound of footsteps approached. Sidurgu narrowed his eyes to the rafters above them, sensing someone else had begun watching them. Sidurgu noticed Aunyx’s demeanor shift too, her ears becoming rigid and alert. They both grabbed their broadswords, tightening their grip as the figure moved from out of the shadows, long white hair visible as the person stepped into the light.

Aunyx was the first to relax, her expression growing from concerned to relieved, then angry. Her brows furrowed as she swung her sword onto her back. Sidurgu followed her demeanor and lowered his weapon, though he was still weary about this unknown guest who had joined them. Aunyx called up to the figure. "How long have you been creeping in the shadows?"

Estinien jumped down to the floor with ease, his usual Dragoon armor dull with lack of polishing. Typical. The elezen stilled carried his mangled lance with him, the base of the weapon still stained red from Nidhogg's blood.

"I didn't think you two would ever notice my presence," Estinien's low voice was calm as he approached Aunyx. He stopped several feet in front of her and placed one hand on his hip, shaking his head and sighed. "I've been watching you since you returned to Ishgard, truthfully. Half of the alliance is in a frenzy right now with your disappearance, but you're already aware of that, I suspect."

Sidurgu slowly approached the elezen, aware of who he was now. The former Azure Dragoon of Ishgard. Aymeric's personal attack dog up until he had disappeared from Coerthas after the finale of the war. A pain in the ass to deal with, to put plainly. Sidurgu was, however, interested in what he had to say.

"I'm not going back." Aunyx hissed quietly.

"Oh, I'm not here to drag you back. On the contrary, you finally broke loose." His voice was calm and controlled in contrast to Aunyx, who almost looked like a dog that had been pushed into a corner, ready to bite anyone who tried to constrain her. His eyes glanced over at Sidurgu, who he had ignored completely. "I'm more interested in finding out why. So I followed you. I'm surprised you chose Coerthas of all places. It seems you have friends other than Aymeric in Ishgard."

"Before you ask, nobody followed me. That I made sure of."

"How?" She growled and took a step forward towards Estinien. He did not flinch. She had taken every precaution, every right move, to ensure that she had left undetected. How had

estinien been able to find her so easily? And why did he know so much about the events happening in Ala Mhigo, unless....

“We can talk about that more at length somewhere else. If, you would allow it.”

Aunyx was frozen in place, part of her wanting to run as far away as she could. She had been caught. Where had she gone wrong? Her mind raced as she retraced every step of the journey. Despite her careful planning and preparations, it hadn't been enough to keep herself hidden. If anything, it was even worse that it was Estinien, *of all people*, who had found her. He had managed to stay reclusive to the Scions and even to Aymeric in the events following the ending of the war, why had he spent energy on following her? She realized that he had her pinned. If she didn't comply, he could easily alert the alliance to her whereabouts. The adrenaline of earlier had returned, though this time it was riddled with anxiety.

“Fine.”



# Concede

## Chapter Summary

“You look unwell.” Estinien spoke, noting the grimaced guise that spread across her cheeks and temple.

“When haven’t I looked unwell these past months.” It was true- there had been no respite from her duties. “Nobody can expect me to keep moving forward like this.”

“They see you as infallible.”

“Well, they’re wrong.”

“So you ran.”

She had.

## Chapter Notes

6/13/2020: MAJOR CHAPTER UPDATE

I wasn't satisfied with the chapter so I did a pretty big update, especially towards middle/end section. Please reread, important plot stuff was fixed. Thank you! And yes I will stop posting chapters at midnight without fully proofreading RIP me.

That 5.3 content drought really out here making me update a fic I haven't touched in awhile ha ha

kind of a filler but I needed to write this before moving on to other stuff.

CONTENT WARNING: Alcohol abuse/drinking ahead

“I haven’t been here in eons, even before the end of the war.” Estinien’s muddy boots hit the surface of the dimly lit table with a loud *SMACK!*, the boisterous tavern-goers mingling among the dark room behind the elezen and miqu’te. Estinien looked quite pleased with himself as his eyes glanced around the bar- watchful for any familiar faces that may cut his encounter with the Warrior of Light short. The Forgotten Knight was just as Aunyx remembered- Damp. Sticky. And full to the brim with would-be warriors and mercenaries drinking away their hard earned gil or spent on a pretty girl for a night of pleasure. She couldn’t say much though, considering the amount of time she had spent lingering in it’s halls

during the dragonsong conflict. Between Sidurgu and Tataru, she had spent more than a lifetime's worth of idling within the infamous establishment. Truthfully, she could have gone the rest of her life without setting foot here again. Yet, there they were. A cruel twist of fate that she would find herself within these halls again, and under much less happy conditions. Aye, she couldn't have thought of a better, or seedier, place to sit down with the former Azure Dragoon to drill him with questions. Why had he followed her across Eorzea, how long and how close had he watched her every move?

Estinien opened his mouth, but before he had a chance to speak further, Aunyx stood from her seat at the table, slitted purple eyes almost piercing through the silver-haired warrior before her.

"You can't expect me to sit here, with you, without a drink, do you?" Her voice was cool and level but inside she could feel the blood rising to her face and ears. Though Estinien held the upper hand in this encounter, she knew he held a faint glimmer of respect for her title, if not for her herself. She didn't give him a chance to answer her, instead turning and making her way to the service counter across the room. Weaving through the crowded mess of drunken bodies was a task in itself with the heavy fending armor weighing on her body let alone for how fatigued she felt. She was tired from exchanging blades with Sidurgu- and now she had traversed up to the city center and up all those goddamn stairs. Reaching the counter, and minding her hands as she avoided touching the cracked wooden counter that was no doubt just as sticky as the tables, she glanced at the options before her. All the same garbage as usual- either watered down ale, usually an old reserve from the back room, or whiskey straight from the barrel it aged in. Both terrible choices- but it was all there ever was. The decision wasn't difficult to make, and she made her way back towards the table in the corner of the room with two hands full of whiskey-laden glasses.

"You shouldn't have." Estinien's hand reached for one of the cups before the miqo'te recoiled. The elezen's eyebrow upturned and a glare flashed across his face.

Aunyx threw back the first glass with ease, the liquid gold passing over her lips and down her throat without ever touching her tongue. It was emptied in one sweep, a dry chuckle barely audible from Estinien.

"Well, it seems the pious Warrior of Light has taken up a nasty habit."

"Pious, my ass." She retorted. "It's hard to be considered a holy person when all you ever do is kill anyone who disagrees with you."

“Few seasons ago, you would have never uttered those words.”

“And a few seasons ago, you would have never actively hunted me across the continent, let alone to have mindless chit chat with me. Why are you here?”

Estinien tilted back into his chair once more before a more solemn expression grew across his face.

“You’re little stunt has the entire alliance running around like a beheaded chocobo. Rumors have spread down to the infantry- that you’ve abandoned your post and the rebellion. That there’s no point in this battle- Garlemald holds much greater technology than we can defeat with simple aether and magicks. Machines that can take down an entire frontline. Our weaponry cannot withstand ironclad warmachines. Men from all the grand companies are dropping their weapons and feigning defeat.

“Even the alliance leaders are faltering. Nobody has an inkling on why you would abandon them- Which makes this all the more interesting that you’ve made your way here, to Ishgard. And in the company of a Dark Knight, no less.”

A lump in her throat grew. He had followed her enough to know about Sidurgu- which surely meant he knew of Rielle. It wasn’t hard to believe that Estinien knew of Rielle’s past, due to his former, lofty position in the Ishgardian military. Though Rielle had all been left alone since the time of Countess Ystride defeat, the thought of someone coming after her had never left Aunyx’s mind. It had been one of the reasons she had fled Ishgard without a simple goodbye.

“I shouldn’t be too surprised though, the path of a Dark Knight aligns perfectly with your demeanor. Ever the one to protect the weak, despite being told otherwise.”

*Ah, he knew.*

The warmth spread through her body as she tended to her second drink, albeit slower than the first. Her surprise quickly turned guarded. “Why should I believe anything you say. For one to accuse me of abandonment, when you yourself disappeared after the war ended without a single thank you, I might add.”

“I have nothing to gain by exposing the only warrior strong enough to fell eikons single-handedly with such slander. Do you really think the alliance would take my word over yours? Nay, you’ve gone mad if you think they would trust me after all that has happened.

“It’s easier to let some things die on their own. Ompagne and his lot made quick of that themselves, without much intervention needed on our end. The only one that remains is that au ra, and I suppose, you.”

Aunyx’s grip on her glass tightened as the words failed to come to her. She had little knowledge past what Sidurgu had told her, and what Fray had shown her about their late mentor. She knew he had been a respected man in his youth, until he had been shown the true wickedness of the church and the lengths they would go to protect a wolf among their own sheep. It echoed painfully close to her own experiences.

Without a moment, Fray’s voice cut across her mind, the anger and disdain mounting as Aunyx recalled the memories he had shared with her. *Those so-called saintly knights cut him down, they tricked him into an ambush and outnumbered him. Honor among men, what a load of chocobo shite. They took turns driving their silver blades into his chest and spilling his organs across the footsteps of their so-called holy god. We knew only of his death once they paraded his body through the Brume for all to see. They wanted us to see, to strike fear into us. It only ignited our hatred more.*

“You look unwell.” Estinien spoke, noting the grimaced guise that spread across her cheeks and temple.

“When haven’t I looked unwell these past months.” It was true- there had been no respite from her duties. “Nobody can expect me to keep moving forward like this.”

“They see you as infallible.”

“Well, they’re wrong.”

“So you ran.”

She had.

Estinien sat in equal silence with Aunyx, the miko’te finishing the last drop of her second drink. The elezen motioned to one of the bar maidens that was making her rounds, whispering in her ear and receiving a curt nod from the hyur girl. Momentarily, the girl returned, more drinks in her hand as she slid them on the table. This time, Estinien took one of the drinks for himself, and pushed the other drink towards Aunyx.

“I shouldn’t enable you, but you deserve it after the hell the scions have dragged you through.”

“I don’t need your pity.” She spat, eying the drink before she slammed it back much like the first. The alcohol was beginning to ebb at her defenses, edges of her vision before to blur ever so slightly. An escape that she had been using as company since her first step in Kugane.

She hid it well, her close relationship with the bottle, and none would have been the wiser along her journey. It started with drinking in celebration of large victories in the field, then moved to smaller and small wins and insignificant moments. Then she turned to it in moments of defeat, to wash away the burdens of loss. Towards the end of her journey in the east, it had turned into a nightly ritual when she was gifted with evenings alone. It dulled the senses she no longer wanted to endure, an escape when she couldn’t get away from the fights, the battles, the memories. She had watched herself slip into this cycle without much thought. If she could fight, what did it matter?

“Drinking your problems away works for awhile, but it won’t last.” Estinien took a swig of his drink, drying his mouth with the sleeve of his under armour. “You’re gonna have to face your problems eventually, or die before you get a chance.”

“Shut up and buy another round.”

-----

It had been *at least* an hour since Sidurgu had taken his post outside the Forgotten Knight, glowing limbal-ringed eyes glaring at those coming and going from the establishment. He did not recognize any of its patrons like he had once before, when he had used the inn as a retreat from missions and quests, and then again when Rielle had fallen into his life following Fray's demise and Aunyx's arrival. It held few fond memories for him- the majority of them involved Fray drinking himself to the hardwood floors in celebration of killing a high-profile target. He too had once basked in the thrill alongside Fray- but it held somber memories of the days that followed his companion's death. It was a wretched place filled with bad memories and even poorer mistakes from his youth. Things he would rather forget, even if that meant losing the few precious memories he had. The smell had been ingrained in his armor and clothes for years after, and he now found himself here again under the most unusual circumstances.

The former Azure Dragoon and Aunyx had disappeared through its doors, both of them silent from the brume to the upper levels of the city. The two had a complicated past- Aunyx had often spoke about the difficulties of working with the aloof Dragoon. Estinien and his unwillingness to compromise with the task at hand had been the bane of her existence- yet even she couldn't discount the elezen's prowess. Sidurgu shifted uncomfortably at his spot against the pillar of the building, the snow beginning to lightly fall again and the cold winds sinking into his skin and scales. The sun had set some time ago and the streets had been emptied of its usual daytime hosts. In its place now were the less desirables of the city- the shady dealers who had smuggled in black market goods from beyond the borders, the elezen courtesans looking for an opportunity to swindle a drunk fool leaving the bar, the poor coming out from beneath the shelters of the alleys looking for food or items to barter. Though Ishgard had managed to clean up its daytime appearance for visitors and tradesfolk, the night illustrated all the work yet to be addressed by the Holy See and its court.

In his time standing watch, his mind had wandered to what the two had come here to discuss. The silver haired Dragoon had mentioned that she had disappeared, and the words she growled lingered in his thoughts.

*I'm not going back.*

Back to where? The Frontlines? Gyr Abania? The Scions? He wasn't entirely sure, though her feral reply back in the Brume was enough to know it held a deeper meaning than what it appeared to be on the surface. Try as she might to conceal her reasoning for appearing back in Ishgard without a warning, he knew her better than that. She had panicked and then ran.

Not from an actual enemy, but from conflict. But why? That still perplexed him. Perhaps it was time to pester her for an actual answer to why she had shown up in Coerthas that cold, stormy day...

Sidurgu uncharacteristically flinched as the door to the Forgotten Knight slammed open. The sound of its patrons could be heard from the floor below, as Estinien and Aunyx stepped out into the frigid night. The two had barely taken two steps towards the Dark Knight before Sidurgu could smell the alcohol on both of them, its scent burning his nostrils with its acidic properties.

“Apologies for keeping you waiting.” Estinien said, his voice sarcastically hinting at the amount of time that had passed. “Things took longer than expected. I believe that things have been resolved for the time being, and I’d rather not linger here longer than what’s required of me.”

“Off to stir up more problems abroad I would wager. You’ve already caused enough problems here to last a lifetime.” Sidurgu’s voice was stern and cold, his body poised to react to any move the Dragoon may take as he continued to poke at the Ishgardian’s past. “Or has the Speaker of the House called you back to your post right beside his throne?”

Estinien rolled his eyes briefly, before turning to face the stairs that led to the Gates of Judgement. “I have no quarrel with you, Dark Knight; don’t make me regret that decision.”

“Mm’you’re both being hardasses.” Aunyx slurred as she stood in between them, the effect of the alcohol taking full effect. She had consumed 3 more drinks after her initial round of whiskey, egged on not only by Estinien but by the weeks vacant of alcohol during the leadup to Ghimlyt Dark.

“You’ve both been drinking.” Sidurgu growled. He had spent an hour in the freezing cold for these two to get drunk? “Must have been an important conversation if you had enough time to pour drinks.”

“On the contrary, I have the answers I wanted. Best to not keep this one waiting though; Might have overdone it, I think. she’s on her last legs. I’d hate to have to sling a miqo’te over my shoulders, people might get the wrong impression.”

“You’re a real piece of shite you know that-” Sidurgu could feel his tolerance with the elezen slipping away with every word. Estinien was right though, Sidurgu’s eyes glanced at Aunyx as she stumbled where she stood- she looked far worse off than Estinien. The heavy plated armor probably wasn’t helping either. Her normal, slit pupils were expanded into large, dark pools against her purple irises, barely visible under her now disheveled hair; the miqu’te looked as if she could doze off at any moment. That, or fall to the ground where she stood on legs more wobbly than a newborn coeurl. It wasn’t surprising- an hour would be ample enough time for someone of her size to get absolutely wrecked if drinking heavily. Or moderately.

“Best be heading home, don’t you think.” Estinien irked further, aware of the frustration growing in the au ra.

He wasn’t worth the trouble, Sidurgu decided.

“Letsgo.” Aunyx muttered, and Sidurgu couldn’t tell if she was talking to herself or him. *Fury, she was completely buzzed.* It *would* be easy to just carry her home at this rate. But Aunyx followed as Sidurgu took his leave, Estinien smirking as he watched the miqu’te haphazardly stumble as she followed the burly knight into the dark of the plaza.

As the pair moved across the stone walkways back towards the Jeweled Crozier, Aunyx paused occasionally, her scattered mind making this trek much longer than it needed to be.

“Last I checked I wasn’t a babysitter.” Sidurgu rumbled, stopping in his footsteps as he eyed Aunyx, who was now several malms behind him. It had to be past midnight at this rate, though Sidurgu had no way of telling. He was tired, achy and downright miffed at how the day had turned out. Rielle was sure to chew both of them out when they returned, armor and broadsword in hand after she had explicitly told them to take it easy. And now he was bringing back a completely blitzed Aunyx that could hardly keep focus for more than a few footsteps.

“Last I’uh checked I didn’t m’ask you to be.” Aunyx stuttered back in a similar, mocking tone. “I don’t need someone to take care of me, I can do it m’self.”

Sidurgu gave a dry, sarcastic laugh, completely in disbelief at the predicament he had found himself in. At least Rielle didn’t do this. Aunyx stopped again.



“Oh for god’s sake, *can you keep walking* .” Sidurgu was growing tired of the game they were playing. His horns were iced over, along with the scales that lined his face; It was cold, he was hungry, and he wanted nothing more than to lie down and rest his worn muscles. “You’re worse than Fray when he would drink. At least he knew when he was completely in over his head.”

“I’m not ov’r my head.”

“You’re bumbling along like a fresh coerthas pup drenched in liquor, or are you more drunk than I originally thought if you can’t see it yourself.”

“Shut your mouth.” Her temper flared momentarily at Sidurgu’s sharp retort, pausing again in the dimly lit walkway. Her expression was dark as her eyes pulled back into a glare, the fatigue leaving her face from moments before. The air between them grew tense, neither moving their feet from their spots, frozen in a temporary showdown. “I don’t ave to take this shit from you.”

“You’re the one that got drunk with the *revered bloody Azure Dragoon*, for twelves sake. And now you can’t even take two steps without falling to the ground. Of all the places, you came to Ishgard to what? Kill a few marks? Make some easy gil? Drink and drown your sad sorrows in cheap liquor?”

“..No.”

“Then why did you come back.”

Aunyx remained silent, the temper gone from her face as Sidurgu’s words burned into her skin.

*The Scions.*

*The war.*

*The voice.*

*Zenos.*

The memories, the visions blurring together of Gyr Abania, the infiltration of the Doman enclave, the scions each succumbing to the unknown slumber...

“I...I let everyone down. I couldn’t, I should’ve *saved them*. The scions...nobody knows how to fix them. Bring them back. I’m all that’s left..” Once the words started pouring from her mouth, it felt like they wouldn’t stop. “I don’t want to be me ‘nymore.”

She was unraveling, Sidurgu tensed up as the miqo’té’s emotions ebbed in her words, still slurred from the alcohol’s effects. *Scions? Bringing them back? Were they...did they...* Sidurgu’s heartbeat pulsed in his throat, the situation was more complicated and convoluted than he could have imagined.

“...What good...if i can’t fix anyth’ing...”

Sidurgu took a step towards her, cautiously watching her reaction as he inched towards the disheveled miqo’té. Her aether, usually undetectable, was agitated, the invisible force filling the air around her. It’s movement was uncontrolled, almost animalistic as it poured from her. It eerily reminded him of a hunt mark- cornered, scared, and unable to hide. Ready to lash out at any moment...

The telltale signs of darkness uncontrolled and left to fend for itself with no resolution.

It hit him in that moment.

“I didn’t mean it.” Sidurgu was lying- he *had* completely meant it, but realized it was vital to ease the situation that was quickly deteriorating. “Aunyx. When was the last time you did communion?”

“...Tired” Was all he was able to decipher from her as she remained immobile, ignoring his question entirely. Her ears had drooped down, though the scarring on her ear was still visible even amongst her tousled, dark hair. Her bright, almost glowing eyes illuminated her face as he closed the gap between them, his own blue eyes glowing in the darkness.

It would do no good to try and commune in the current state she was in, no matter how unrelenting her aether was as it waned from her fatigue. Much to his displeasure, it would have to wait and be addressed when she was free from fatigue and the effects of alcohol...

“The sooner we get back, the sooner we can both rest.” Reasoning was beyond her at this point, he noted, and Sidurgu instead took to speaking plainly and frankly. Aunyx refused to move, the last strands of energy all being used to stand in place. He wasn’t sure if she could really walk anymore, either. The words had barely left his mouth before he had realized what he had offered.

“Do you want me to carry you?”

“Mm” the sound was a mere grumble through her throat, and she spoke nothing else.

*Was that a yes, or no?*

“Give me your sword.” Sidurgu instructed. Aunyx, movements slightly delayed, fumbled as she attempted to undo the leather straps across her chest. Growing impatient, Sidurgu bent down and quickly undid the bindings, slipped the harness over her head, and flung the much smaller broadsword across his back. He then reached an armor-plated arm around her back, and used his free arm to hoist her up into his arms. Not surprising, she weighed almost nothing, even in the fending armor. *Hells*, his own blade probably weighed more than her. He adjusted as the miko’te relaxed into the carry, her tail dropping and swishing back and forth lazily against the chains adorned at his waist. She was almost liquid in his arms, heavy and tired and still reeking of alcohol. Her aether had calmed from before, though the hot and angry aether could still be detected under her armor and skin as he adjusted his hold on her.

He wasn’t aware how close her face was to his, his dark horns dangerously close to her cheek. It didn’t seem to phase her, he noted, as her eyes struggled to stay open. They fluttered momentarily, fighting the urge to slip into sleep. She looked more at peace than he had seen

her since her return, his stomach dropping as he came to realize why she had drank so much. What fate had befallen the Scions? What had happened in her time away from Ishgard?

“Why in the seven hells did you come back here, of all places.” He mused again, mostly to himself as they drew closer to the apartment. She had closed her eyes shortly after they had set off again, the rising of her chest now a steady and slow rhythm. It was comforting, albeit Sidurgu didn’t want to admit it.

To his surprise, her answer was different from her earlier breakdown.

Her words were slurred, now moreso with drowsiness than alcohol. “Come home.”

*Come home.*

Sidurgu fumbled to free one of his hands as Aunyx slid from his carry, her hands tangled in his armor as she steadied herself against his body. The alcohol had begun to wear off- though not enough to clear the buzz-induced fog from her mind. Sidurgu momentarily struggled with the door, before the key clicked into place and opened to the dark entryway. He quickly scooped her up again, this time throwing her over his shoulder carefully, and used his foot to close the door behind him. To his surprise, Rielle was nowhere to be seen in the living quarters of the main room- the fire had been stoked some time ago as the embers emitted weak rays of light and warmth. He’d never hear the end of it, he was sure, if she had stayed up late waiting for their return.

With Aunyx still thrown over his shoulder, he moved towards the bedroom, minding his movement as he carefully maneuvered through the doorframe. Placing Aunyx gently at the foot of the bed, he took a moment to catch his breath- however light she was, he still had to carry her halfway across the city with a full set of tank armor and a spare sword thrown over his back. It didn’t take long for Sidurgu to look up from where he was kneeling to see her fingers fumbling with the ties and clips of her breastplate, clearing struggling as she attempted to disrobe herself.

“I want it off.”

Sidurgu sighed. His work was not yet done.

He moved to a kneeled position on one knee, tentatively removing his own gauntlets before reaching for her own. He slid both of them off with ease, noting the scars that littered her hands from countless battles. They mimicked his own, markings and scars across his knuckles and scales from various skirmishes. Her hands moved back towards the clips that held her chestplate in place, her sighs growing more frustrated as they refused to come free.

He sighed, patience waning as she swatted his hands away. She was downright unagreeable, he thought, making note that she was not allowed to drink herself this far gone ever again. “If you want it off you’re going to have to let me help you.”

“I can do it myself.”

“You obviously can’t, *so let me help you damn it.* ”

She became silent, eyes watching as Sidurgu tentatively moved again towards the chest piece, clicking the secures off as the armor came loose. He worked in silence as he removed the remaining pieces of armor off the miquo’te, taking note to carefully place each heavy, metal piece of armor on the floor. Once again, his face was eerily close to hers, her eyes like daggers as he avoided her gaze at all costs. The abyss within him swarmed and ebbed at his chest, growing more aggravated by the moment. Why did he feel like this? Why was his own aether as of late so chaotic, so unruly, so-

“You’ve pretty eyes, did I ever tell you that?”

Her voice was still laced with alcohol, but the clarity of her words made him look up from his work, left completely speechless. He had been called terrible things, awful, vile things. A compliment, much less one that didn’t involve his sword technique, was unwarranted. Yet the swirling abyss in his chest seemed to flare, aching and burning with every flame that dared to break through his skin.

“You’re drunk still.”

“Yeah but I mean it.”

Sidurgu met her gaze for a moment, hoping to find some sort of lie within her eyes. This was some sort of foul, tasteless joke. But no matter how he tried, her eyes only looked back at his own with an earnest regard. He broke the gaze, averted his eyes as he felt a warm flood of heat to his face and scales.

“Sleep. You’ll have a nasty enough hangover without staying up until dawn.”

He stood up from his kneeled position, removing his own layers of armor and fabric as he went. He stripped to his under armour, a black high-collared shirt with dark trousers, before leaning against the wardrobe at the other side of the room. Aunyx had crept under the sheet on the bed, an already rhythmic sound emitting from her as she snored quietly. Sliding with his back against the cabinet, Sidurgu positioned himself as comfortably as he could on the room’s floor, ready to keep watch for the rest of the night. Though sleep would feign him tonight, he knew it was more important to keep watch over Aunyx in her current state.

The last thing he needed was her stumbling out into the living room and spilling the contents of her stomach across the floor. Tomorrow would be enough of a headache and he had already dealt with enough shit- cleaning puke up was at the bottom of his to-do list.

# Reveal

## Chapter Summary

“I. Well.” *I carried your drunken mess of a body home, removed your cuirass and pauldrons as you fought tooth and nail to keep them on, and kept watch for most of the night to make sure you didn’t choke on your own vomit* was the first thing that came to his mind. Not exactly tactful, he thought, though admittedly he was not one to speak eloquently.

## Chapter Notes

I'm alive here's an update \*yeet\*

Also, please note that I did make some changes to last chapter after i published it- please reread if you read it a few days after i posted. Thanks :-)

also ILY if you have read my indulgent, messy, angsty WOL/NPC ship and have gotten this far ah aha ha h a

Sidurgu was the first to awaken, the room still dark as his pupils adjusted to the room around him. He had momentarily forgotten why he was sitting on the floor of his room, still wearing his usual underclothes before remembering the eventful evening from the day before. A rumbling noise in his chest was audible to only himself as he recalled the mere hours prior, and a slightly sore back confirmed his suspicions that it had, indeed, happened. Thankfully, besides his own grumbling, it was quiet. He could hear no movement from outside the room- Rielle had to still be asleep after staying up the night before waiting for their return. Another headache to deal with; her reprimanding them for sneaking out and sparring. It was warranted, he supposed, considering how the day before had transpired. It had been his idea to sneak out and spar, afterall. Had he not encouraged the idea, they wouldn’t have encountered Estinien, Aunyx wouldn’t have gotten drunk beyond reason, and he wouldn’t have a looming, annoyingly worrisome feeling sitting at the bottom of his stomach, with Aunyx passed out from binge-drinking and spilling her well-guarded secrets in the middle of an empty Ishgardian street now sleeping across the room from him. Well, it was better than her spilling her guts, literally, he supposed.

*Ah.*

The events brought his body back into a heightened sense of awareness as he shifted a leg upright into a more comfortable position and rubbed his face with the palm of his hand. Between his fingers, he could make out the blurry shape of Aunyx on the bed, the blankets and sheets torn away from her body, probably discarded as she moved and kicked away the coverings sometime during the night. At least she had stayed in the bed- from what he could tell, she had managed to keep herself from getting sick during the night. If her condition hadn't been questionably unstable and unhinged, he would have been thoroughly impressed. Instead, despite his best efforts to not get emotionally involved, he realized the gravity of the situation he had now found himself entangled in. He couldn't live in peace, *twelve be damned*.

And that didn't even include his questions regarding the buildup of agitated aether within her body. Something he *knew* he had cautioned her about. He had warned her time and time again during her first few months of training with the greatsword. It was one of the most important aspects of harnessing a Dark Knight's source of power; communion. The tether that brought the abyss's strength into its host's body. But there was a catch to its power; there was always a catch. For one to store its amassing strength and wield its power within something as fragile as a physical form, without retribution, would surely be the eventual end for its bearer. It wasn't something to turn off when it was no longer needed. It loomed within its host's body, seeking an outlet. And it never truly left- but it could be pacified with communion.

She had never answered his question about her communion.

Moving quietly, he stood from his spot on the dusty wooden floor, taking care to avoid the many pieces of armor that were strewn across the ground.

Though cautious, his movements had caused Aunyx to awaken ever so slowly, a single eye barely open as she stirred awake. Sidurgu could feel eyes on himself as soon as she had awoken, and the two remained quiet as the xaela crossed his arms and leaned against the doorway, one horn listening for any sign of Rielle. His body was purposefully blocking the door, the only escape where Aunyx could flee from his prying questions. And many questions he *had* , and expected to be addressed here and now.

“You're looking better than expected after last night's festivities” Sidurgu coolly spoke, cautiously testing the waters with the miqo'te as she was visibly hungover. Her ears remained droopy from the night before as she slowly sat up in the bed, her movements shaky and



ragged as she attempted to regain balance. It was clear she wasn't entirely certain where she was, eyes darting around the room as she realized that she was back in the apartment.

"I wouldn't call last night a celebration." Aunyx's voice cracked slightly from the dryness of her throat- and the result of a restless night. Though she had managed to sleep, the restlessness of sobering up had left her with a poor night's rest. "In truth, I only remember bits of it."

"And what parts do you remember?"

It took her a moment to gather her thoughts and recollections from the night prior, though hazy as her memories were they were still there. She remembered Estinien, the forgotten knight, her conversations regarding the Ghymlyt Dark....

"When did I get back? Back here, I mean." Aunyx pondered out loud, the pieces of her memories upon returning to the small apartment empty, her thoughts drawing a blank try as she might to remember.

Sidurgu shifted uncomfortably, now aware that she had no recollection of how the night before had transpired. She had no memory of him carrying her pitifully drunk body back, removing her armor, her offhanded compliment she had given him...

"I. Well." *I carried your drunken mess of a body home, removed your cuirass and pauldrons as you fought tooth and nail to keep them on, and kept watch for most of the night to make sure you didn't choke on your own vomit* was the first thing that came to his mind. Not exactly tactful, he thought, though admittedly he was not one to speak eloquently. "It doesn't matter how you got here." He growled instead. "Nothing happened after you left the Forgotten Knight, I made sure of that. Though I'd rather not deal with you being as drunk as a newly inaugurated temple knight again anytime soon."

"I'd like some answers, though. None of this elusive, secretive shite that you've been doing since you stepped passed the gates." He continued, caring to keep his voice somewhat hushed in the event Rielle was eavesdropping. Sidurgu finally approached the conversation that had made his stomach turn throughout the night. "You mentioned some things in your drunken stupor that, I think, I deserve to know about."

It was Aunyx's turn to feel her stomach flip. What had she said? Was it about the war, the scions, Zenos- her eyes darted to the door, noticing that Sidurgu's body was blocking her only escape out of the conversation. She was trapped, and even in a near-sober state she wouldn't be able to wrestle her way out of the room with Sidurgu's brute strength and favorable size difference. She was stuck here until Sidurgu was satisfied with her answers.

"Fine." She braced herself for the onslaught of questions. "It seems I have no choice. Ask away."

"When was the last time you communed?"

She hadn't expected that to be Sidurgu's first question. Though, it too bore a similar weight to the other secrets she had kept from him. It was more embarrassing, really, as it pertained to Dark Knight matters instead of her life as the Warrior of Light.

"I don't remember." She replied plainly. It was the truth, afterall. Fray had asked her the same thing when she had first returned to the highlands. It had been a long time; longer than it should have been. The dark ebb and flow that intertwined with her aether made that abundantly apparent to herself- she had neglected to care for the darkness that swelled under the fragile blanket of her physical form. At first it had been a mere flicker in the back of her mind, a reminder of who she had become in her time in Ishgard. But as time went on, and that flicker grew into a flame, then a flame into a furious blaze; she could not address it. Or rather, she chose to not address it. It had crept up so slowly that it's intensity was too strong by the time she had realized what had become of it. Such was the way of a warrior- there were other things to worry about than themselves.

"It's nothing to worry about. I can handle it." She continued, once again pushing the thought back into the confines of her consciousness. Another problem to be dealt with another day.

Sidurgu sighed abruptly, frustration mounting as she skirted around the question yet again. He pressed against his nose scales as he once again found himself explaining the purpose and importance of communing. "Those who came before us with the same flippant outlook found themselves left for dead, or worse, with that mindset. The abyss is not something you can idly push away at your convenience."

"You've told me already." Aunyx listlessly responded. She had heard this countless times.

“I’ll stop when you actually listen to me.”

“It’s not that I don’t already know...” It was true. She hadn’t forgotten his words, no matter how far she had traveled from Ishgard. Fray, and later Sidurgu’s lessons had not fallen on deaf ears. She knew the destructive power that could be laid before her in the event of aether unleashing itself upon the land from its physical binds- she had seen similar events throughout her journeys in Eorzea and beyond.

“I’ve been busy.” Aunyx trailed off again.

“You’ve already said that.”

“I-”

*“What in the seven hells is so damn important that you can’t tell me.”* Sidurgu’s frustration dripped into his response, more so than he would have liked. “You keep making excuse after excuse.”

Sidurgu stopped himself from continuing; his anger would not add anything of import in this exchange. Sighing, he shifted uncomfortably- did she truly not trust him to keep her secret? She had confessed to him the scion’s trials and tribulations many times before, often freely. Why was this any different?

“I just.” Sidurgu tried to find the right words, concern be damned. “I just thought since we are walkers of the path that we could be open with each other. About shit like this.”

Another pause.

“I don’t want to drag you or Rielle into this. It’s not your burden to carry.” Her voice was clear and concise as she responded plainly.

“You always talk as if you are the only person to bear the weight of the world on your shoulders. You know better than that.”

Aunyx pulled her legs up to her chest, the top portion of her face the only thing visible as she recoiled into an even small ball among the bedsheets. He was right- she shouldered much of Eorzea’s problems on her own, lest she share it with the scions. But they were not here anymore- Their physical bodies remained, each falling one by one, devoid of aether but reasonably healthy otherwise. For the first time, Aunyx had carried the burden of the weight by herself. It weighed heavier than it should for one to carry by themselves.

And so she half-heartedly sighed, and began the story. She started with the scions departing from the east, their return to fell Zenos once and for all. The battle with shinryu upon the azure clouds and aetheric currents, and the subsequent death of the garlean prince in the gardens of the Ala Mhigan Quarter . Then, she continued, with the rumors that spurred afterwards- the prince yet lived and walked among the living. The ascian that occupied Zenos as if a puppet on a string. The strange, blurry visions and voices that infiltrated the minds of the scions, each of them eventually falling to it’s strange beckoning. The Ghimlyt Dark. The Garleans threat of destroying the alliances, one by one until feigning victory over the land. The warfields torn apart by mechanical drones and machinery. And the voice of one calling from beyond the rift, the strange plea that threatened to rip her to shreds the more it spoke.

Sidurgu did not interrupt, and remained silent even when Aunyx had finished synopsis of the past few months to the Dark Knight, aware that she sounded downright deranged in her retelling of the events and occurrences.

When he finally spoke, it was short. “I can see why you’ve been too busy to commune.”

“You don’t believe me.”

“I didn’t say that.” Truthfully, from any other he would have called it chocobo shite. But it was hard to deny when the Warrior of Light, uncharacteristically bruised and battered, had shown up in Coerthas. Of all the places to go, she had chosen Coerthas. A shitty, frozen wasteland in the middle of nowhere, overrun by the remains of Nidhogg’s brood and hunt marks that could slaughter even a seasoned hunter. Nobody *willingly* came here unless they didn’t want to be found. Not even one of the most feared and revered warriors to walk the

surface of Eorzea since the 7th umbral calamity would have a reason to come back after the end of the war. “You’ve been busy making new enemies since you left two years ago.”

“A lot can happen in two years when you have a target painted on your back.” Aunyx bemused, a hint of melancholy in her voice.

She was tired. Truthfully, she had been tired since the felling of the Ultima weapon, though that fatigue had grown with every mounting battle and war she had faced. The Ghimlyt dark had been the final nail in the coffin.

“Anything else you want to ask me?” her voice was monotone and she was visibly tired from her retelling of the past few months, of the secrets she had now entrusted with the only person outside of the Scions and the Alliance: Sidurgu.

“I think that’s enough for today.” She had reached her limit, and held true to Sidurgu’s earlier demand- she had told him what he had originally hoped to reveal. Though now, he had more questions. Although his own interests in the matter grew impatient, there was no reason to push her farther than she already was for the time being. Truthfully, he himself needed a moment to gather his thoughts on the items she had revealed. More questions could be asked later- though physically she had recovered since the skirmish with Safat, it was abundantly clear that her mind was unsteady with resolve.

“Besides, we still have to deal with Rielle.” Sidurgu mused. “She’s bound to chew both our asses out for yesterday, and I’d prefer if I wasn’t the only one on the receiving end of it.”

# Hesitate

## Chapter Summary

“Let someone help you for a change, you stubborn cat.” Sidurgu hesitantly began to raise his hand towards hers, watching for a reaction, a withdrawal, any sign of distrust as he inched slowly towards her. She spoke no words, and only silently watched with dagger-like eyes as Sidurgu finally took her hand in his, the deep crimson soul stone tactfully intertwined between both of their fingers.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Sidurgu had been right- the fury that Rielle had unleashed upon the two mercenaries had almost been as brutal as their fight with Safat. The two had taken it in stride- she had every right to admonish them for their absence the night prior, and for sneaking off to spar in the shadows whilst their wounds had still been healing. Neither spoke as she finished her tirade, the red only beginning to leave Rielle’s face as she finished her lashing. Sidurgu had given a half-hearted apology, knowing that no words would calm her fury- it would be best to bear the brunt of her frustration and try to move on as quickly as possible. Though Rielle’s anger was apparent, he knew it would dissipate as quickly as it had come on. Predictable as always, the green haired girl sighed and crossed her arms, a disappointed and disheveled look worn upon her face.

“I expect better from the one who berates me about not following directions.” Rielle finished, lips fashioned in a pout as she returned to her normal demeanor. “Especially when Aunyx is around. You’re usually better mannered than that.”

Before Sidurgu had a chance to defend himself, Aunyx had leaned forward on the seat that they had both been positioned on. Her eyes were still darkened from her hangover, though her speech and mannerisms had improved greatly in the hours after her awakening. She held no sign of the conversation that she and Sidurgu had held behind closed doors.

“If anything” Aunyx started, the calm in her voice an eerie comparison from her morning confessions to Sidurgu. She continued, “It was my fault. I ran into an old friend and we lost track of time. I should have kept a better watch on my surroundings; don’t blame Sid for my mistake.”

She made no mention of drinking or their encounter with the former Azure Dragoon.

“And whose idea was it to go behind my back and spar?” Rielle rebutted, knowing full well who was behind the suggestion, green eyes casting a glance at the Xaela sitting beside Aunyx. “For two accomplished warriors, you two are terrible at making good choices.”

This elicited a smirk from Aunyx, if only for a brief moment. “If I was one to make good choices, I would have become a retainer manager and made far more gil than I have made as a mercenary.”

Sidurgu remained silent, watching as the miqo'te slowly shifted the mood of the conversation, transitioning into a more light-hearted banter between the three of them. She was still charming, twelve be damned, and charismatic enough to sway conversations in her favor- a feat that Sidurgu was most appreciative of, especially in this moment. Her time spent across the Ruby Sea had served her well- steering conversations in a different direction was a well known, and exercised, trait in the markets of Kugane and through Othard. Sidurgu, unfortunately, did not have the charm to persuade Rielle away from arguments, much to his frustration. Thankfully, Rielle, satisfied with the outcome of the tongue-lashing she had bestowed upon the two, soon departed as she normally did most afternoons. Sidurgu had mentioned during the first few days of Aunyx's arrival how Rielle wandered through Ishgard, now unconcerned with the potential attack from the knights that patrolled the streets. Though Sidurgu was hesitant to bring her on hunts, he knew she could defend herself within the city walls. In turn with her newfound freedom, she had spent many of her afternoons in the library near the cathedral, ever hungry for more knowledge for healing and magicks.

As the door latched behind Rielle, Aunyx's posture returned to a loose pose, arms flung over her thighs haphazardly as she bowed her head and she let out a long, exasperated sigh. Guard let down, he could see one of her deep slitted eyes staring at him through the tangled locks that fell around her face. “She's grown a lot. I don't ever remember her having that kind of confidence to call you out like that.”

Sidurgu relaxed as well, positioning his arms across the back of the seat, sinking into the cushion as his body slid into a more comfortable pose, and looked away from the miqo'te. “Be thankful you've been gone for the better half of two years. She's getting more difficult to live with the more she trains and studies.”

“Sounds like she’s taking after you, Sid.”

“Fury help me if that’s the case.”

“It’s only natural, you’ve raised her afterall.”

Sidurgu paused momentarily, hesitant about his reply.

“Would’ve been nice to have help.” Was all he said, eyes averted as his eyes were fixated across the room opposite of Aunyx.

Aunyx said nothing in return.

Sidurgu shifted hesitantly- he had waited to receive their verbal punishment from Rielle and her subsequent departure from the apartment, but now that he was left with Aunyx, he could feel his pulse rising as he branched back towards their earlier conversation. The flames of the abyss stoked the heat through his body as it rose from its place of slumber. Much like before at Camp Dragonhead, it grew restless and burned itself into his veins, a fiery liquid rising as his pulse elevated.

He finally took the plunge.

“Where’s your soul stone?”

Aunyx’s feline ears pricked up at the sudden change in the conversation. The miqo’té held up her wrist, a dazzling blue stone attached to a leather bracelet that hung loosely on her small wrist. The Dragoon emblem shone brightly against her skin, a slight blue hue emitting from within it’s interior.

“I’m not talking about that one.”



Another sigh escaped the miqo'te's lips, those this time it was tinged with a hint of annoyance.

"You're still going on about communion, huh." The miqo'te's tail flicked nervously behind her back, swaying back and forth in a slightly aggravated fashion. She lowered her arm, the blue stone disappearing from sight as she continued to skirt around Sidurgu's inquiries.

"I'm not dropping it, if that's what you're wondering." His voice was stern, eyes glowing from beneath his white fringe as he finally found the courage to directly face Aunyx. The miqo'te remained unmoved for a moment, before slowly standing from her seat and moving towards the back bedroom. She disappeared behind the doorway, now out of sight and completely silent.

*Was she trying to run away from the conversation? Did she really think that would work?*

Much to his relief, she returned to the doorway, her left hand balled in a fist as she moved once again towards the couch, positioning herself as she sat with one leg thrown over the other. The miqo'te had remained in her under clothes from the night before, though part of her top now hung delicately off one of her shoulders, revealing healed wounds from battles prior. Sidurgu repositioned himself as well, his scaled tail hanging off the edge of the couch as he watched her movements carefully. Aunyx slowly opened her fingers to reveal a well-worn, red gem in her palm, scratches and dust littering its surface. The engraving of the Dark Knight sigil was visible upon the facet, though time had begun to smooth its ragged edges. Unlike the other stone, there was no light to be found emanating from its core. It was almost lifeless in comparison.

"I still carry it, but it's seen better days." Aunyx mused, rolling the stone back and forth gently against her palm. "It's been buried in my bag since i left, but i've never forgotten it."

Sidurgu raised his own hand this time, a similar red stone attached to a tattered, poorly braided bracelet that adorned his wrist. The contrast of his black scales made the stone's bright hue stand out, assisted with the dimly lit room as the sun had begun its retreat to the horizon. Unlike her stone, Sidurgu's radiated with a deep red glow, pulsing ever so slightly as if the abyss flowed through its very being.

“Your stone speaks a different story than what you’ve been telling.” His voice was low as he gently lowered his arm after the comparison, irritated that she had left her soul in such a disheveled state. “And so does your aether. It’s been agitated since you stepped foot in Coerthas. You’ve let it stew for awhile, by the look and feel of it.”

Aunyx clutched the soul gem in her hand again, and pressed it closer to her chest. “It’s not any of your concern. I will take care of it when it’s needed.”

“I’m not letting you leave until you take care of it.” Sidurgu’s voice was laced with dissatisfaction at her answer. Of course she would try and put it off- she had done so for so long, why would communing now change anything? Reasoning with her was almost a mute point, try as he might. But how could she stand the seething fury that had been infused and intertwined with her aether? The violent crashing waves of the abyss washing over anyone else would send them into a disarray. Mayhem. Shambles. Unless...

“You don’t care if it consumes you, do you?”

Aunyx gave no refute. No argument.

That was her plan.

And Sidurgu was entirely against it.

“Stubborn as always.” Sidurgu muttered to himself and moved closer, drawing the gap between them smaller and smaller. Aunyx tried to slide back further, away from the approaching au ra, but there was nowhere to immediately escape to, trapped on the coach with the armrest pinning her there, with him. “Doesn’t being a martyr get tiring?”

“I’m not trying to be a martyr.” Defending herself, she moved her face closer to Sidurgu’s, close enough to see the delicate details of his glowing limbal rings against the dark sclera of his eyes. The bluish green tint of his eyes contrasted with his light hair and skin, burning bright and determined. Every small, scaled detail across his face was so easily seen at this angle, small nicks and scars barely visible against the charcoal scales.

“Then why won’t you let anyone help you. You’re so damn concerned with the safety of everyone else but yourself.” It took Sidurgu a moment to register how close he was to the warrior’s face, the smallness of her own body dwarfed by his own looming presence. He refused to move, however uncomfortable he grew at the distance maintained between them. “You’d light yourself on fire if it meant you’d keep others warm.”

The words hit aunyx like a well timed gut punch. Sidurgu’s words echoed Fray’s own, the same phrase the departed Dark Knight had uttered the moment that Aunyx had descended into Coerthas. Both were right- the sacrifices she had made, and had continued to make along her wayward way as a Warrior of Light had taken its toll. Time and time again she had bore the brunt of the suffering of others, the penance for those who had done Eorzeans wrong. It was what was expected from the scions; what was expected from her. No matter her feelings, her reluctance.

“Let someone help *you* for a change, you stubborn cat.” Sidurgu hesitantly began to raise his hand towards hers, watching for a reaction, a withdrawal, any sign of distrust as he inched slowly towards her. She spoke no words, and only silently watched with dagger-like eyes as Sidurgu finally took her hand in his, the deep crimson soul stone tactfully intertwined between both of their fingers. Her hand, much like the rest of her, was small and felt incredibly delicate in his own grip. He paused for a moment, waiting and expecting her to tear her hand from his own, but she made no movement.

She sat incredibly still, and only continued to watch.

Communing with two people wasn’t impossible; in fact, it was how most fledgling Dark Knights learned the sacred practice. Ompagne had taught Sidurgu, and Sidurgu in turn had taught Fray and later, Aunyx. Learning how to control and harness the abyss’s flame took years of practice and self-discipline- and even then, Communion wasn’t always a straight path forward. Any hint of hesitance, a glimpse of doubt, and the entire practice could be halted in its steps. But communing together with another Dark Knight- to expose yourself and your soul in your entirety. To bear your weaknesses to another, your fears, unfiltered and wild. And to trust the other would keep those revelations hidden and safe, meant a deep bond was forged between the two aetherpools.

But even then, this time it felt different.

Sidurgu could feel his own aether rise to the underside of his skin, almost as if threatening to breach the physical barrier that contained it. It moved differently than Aunyx's aetherpool, almost frenzied, growing ever impatient as he moved closer to her.

"You're one to talk, your aether is just as unruly as mine." Her voice made Sidurgu flinch as it broke the silence between them, whispering quietly as they were almost face to face. Sidurgu's fingers fumbled momentarily as he tried to free his face from the growing warmth that spread over the bridge of his nose.

Sidurgu closed his eyes, thankful to finally be freed of Aunyx's piercing gaze, if only for a moment. Unsure if she was actually following his movements, he breathed deeply through his nose and anchored himself to space around them. The couch. The floor. Coerthas. Anything to tie themselves to the place where they sat at that moment. Sidurgu could feel the miqo'te's fingers gently tightening their grip on his own hand, as he felt a warm rush of magicks pooling between them. At first it felt comfortably warm, hauntingly familiar, but grew hotter with each passing moment. Her Aether felt violent and feral- lashing out as if it was a cornered, starved animal. It had longed to be freed, to be calmed and soothed. And yet she was hesitant, holding back the crashing wave of the abyss with the thin layer of control she had left. She continued to hold it in.

"This only works if you trust me." He encouraged, feeling his own aether grow restless as he focused on Aunyx.

"I know."

Slowly, but surely, the miqo'te's aether pooled around them, invisible in it's appearance but heavy nonetheless as the air began to feel thick. It ebbed and flowed, small traces of aetherial energy glittering as it drifted through the occasional sun beam, the orange hues of the sun setting illuminating the room around them, ablaze in a warm blanket of intermittent light. Though his own aether needed attending, Sidurgu instead focused on Aunyx's, the weary and needy aether in much dire demand of attention.

It seemed to speak with no words spoken, a melody of sorrowful words and feelings strung in it's ethereal presence. No matter how forgone it was, it still bore a familiar impression as it enveloped Sidurgu's own aether. She had finally let go, evident by the pooling aether pouring from her body, and a quick peak from beneath his fringe revealing the miqo'te, eyes closed, wearing a look of concentration across her face. Much to his own surprise, his own aether

seemed to be soothed, the two abyss's crashing into one another. The aethers seemed to blend, seemingly with no effort, as they entered the height of communion. Her losses weighed heavy, glimmers of the trials she had endured in her time away, immersed in the darkness that she had carried for gods knows how long. Each victory she had earned along her journey, a small respite, but still not ever enough to cleanse the weight of her regrets. A weight too heavy, even for the Warrior of Light.

Sidurgu took another opportunity to steal a glance at Aunyx, only to ensure that the communion was progressing as normal. Her expression remained unmoved and disconcerting despite their intimate proceedings of aether sharing- Long strands of wine-colored hair were stuck to her forehead from a slight sweat beginning to form on her brow, her exhales more breathy than before as her attention was fully encapsulated with their communion.

He couldn't help the feeling of nervousness swelling in his chest- this time, it had nothing to do with the abyss. For the first time since her arrival, she truly looked at peace, no sign of weariness of burden staining her expression and mannerisms. She was unfiltered in this moment, a true glimpse of the warrior that sat so close to him he could feel her pulse rise and fall with every passing moment. So incredibly close, he thought, he couldn't recall a time where the distance between them had grown so small, outside of sparring.

Hesitantly, he inched forward, a primal desire to be closer to her shrouding what would normally be his better judgement. She remained almost motionless, though now her irises were visible under hooded eyelids, the once dagger-like pupils now encompassing almost all of the purple hues of her iris. The sunseeker made no attempt to push Sidurgu back, to persuade him to pull away as he cautiously moved his free hand to cup her face gently, his large palm encompassing most of her face as he scanned over her own expression for any sign of discomfort, hesitation, anything to make him pull away from her in this moment.

She gave none.

Suddenly, the communion broke, a quick, soundless *snap*! Between the two aethers pulling back to it's hosts, abruptly ending without warning. The heat had retreated from Sidurgu's aetherpool, an unwelcome cold setting in despite the fiery flame that fought to hold any piece of Aunyx's aether close. The sudden lack of aetheric pressure against his own left an unwelcome, empty feeling in his chest. And yet they both remained unmoved, the xaela cupping the sunseeker's jaw and cheek gently with a scaled and scarred hand, their other hands entwined from communion and the soul gem that precariously balanced between the two palms. Though the communion had ended, the burning sensation in his chest, and now

throat, seemed to only worsen, soothed only by the thought of closing the gap that remained between them.

He had lost his damn mind, he thought as his face came closer to hers, studying every mark, every scratch that littered it's surface. To his surprise, her face tilted slightly, as if inviting him to continue his advance, no words uttered between them as each studied each other's movements. Sidurgu's tail flicked back and forth now, nervously closing what little space remained between the two of them, mouth slightly open as his shakily exhaled, finally setting his lips on her own as he hesitantly settled into the kiss. Aunyx made no attempt to avoid the kiss, instead she leaned into it, deepening it as she placed her free hand on top of his cupped hand that held her face in place.

He understood why she had called this place home. In that moment, this was the only place Sidurgu wanted to be.

It was home.

## Chapter End Notes

Unga bunga communion is sexy as hell.

Also hello slow burn content I finally found you.

Ty for reading and the kudos+bookmarks!!!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!