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about 600 words

Allies  
by Skylar Duhe

The smell of animal hide challenges the scent of burning candles as their light flickers along the walls. A torch breaks through the darkness. Stormy and Zarah move through the hallway.

Zarah's skin holds many scars. A slash on her left cheek peeks out from the black war paint streaks across her face. "Commander, I fear for your safety. She should not be here."

Finely crafted leathers hang from Stormy's body with elegance, swaying with every step. "We need them."

"We need them? Or you need her?" Zarah says.

"They hold the territory of the first wreckage to hit this island in hundreds of years."

They stop in front an aged, cracked glass door. Zarah bows her head and opens the door. "Apologies, Commander."

Alex stands on the balcony and overlooks a city in ruins as nature takes back what it rightfully owns. She wears the finest cloths and her hair is woven with braids, common amongst the warriors of the island. The sun hangs low in the afternoon sky and drenches the city in its orange glow.

Stormy steps onto the balcony, unarmored. "You wish to see me?"

Alex swiftly turns and pushes a dagger to Stormy's throat.

Stormy steps back, her back hits the doorframe. Her expression remains strong.

Alex pushes the dagger until Stormy's skin bulges around the blade. Alex glares at her enemy with burning rage. Silence falls heavy around them.

Stormy's eyes show no sign of fear, only regret. "I'm sorry."

The rage in Alex's eyes turn to tears of pain. Her hand trembles. She releases the dagger as she stumbles away from Stormy. It hits the ground and the high-pitched sound cuts through the silence in the room.

"I never meant to hurt you."

"You betrayed my people. You left me to die." Alex screams.

"That's war, Alex." Stormy says.

"That's dishonor." Alex's glare remains steady.

"Do you not stand before me now?" Stormy says.

A wave of heartbreak washes over Alex. "That absolves you of nothing."

Deafening silence once again falls between them as they battle their demons. The sun sinks lower behind the mountain.

Stormy, attempts a different angle. "We can waste time discussing the past, or turn our attention to the battle at hand." She slowly walks in Alex's direction.

"I prefer the option where you leave my room," Alex says.

Stormy moves forward. They stand face to face. "Alex, you possess a strength I have not seen in many years." Stormy leans in.

Alex pushes her away. "What is it that I can do for you, Commander?"

Stormy steps back, unrevealing.

Alex looks at her suspiciously. "You've been summoning me for weeks. Surely there must be a reason."

Stormy stares blankly Alex. She moves into the room. Golden rays of sun illuminate the room decorated in furs. She sits on the couch, a hint of sincerity in her voice. "My people need materials. Your people hold the territory of the wreckage."

Alex stands over her. "That sounds like a whole lot of not my problem."

"Alex..." Stormy says.

"No. Why should I trust you again?" Alex says.

Stormy lets out an exhausted sigh. "You need me."

"Like hell I do." Alex turns to the balcony.

A knock sounds on the door. Stormy stands. "Enter." Two War Chiefs in tattered leathers enter the chambers and bow before the Commander.

"Commander, Athena's army marches upon our farthest village," Zarah reports.

Stormy's expression darkens. "How far?"

"Ten sunsets, Commander," Zarah says.

Stormy and Alex share a look. Stormy turns back to Zarah. "Take half of the army and march to the village."

"As you wish commander." She bows and they exit.

"It is not just my people her army threatens, Alex. I can protect your people here. Train them to fight."

Alex is lost in thought. "If we give you the wreckage."

"That metal means new weapons for my warriors, and protection for yours." Stormy says.

"How do I know you won't take our home, and leave us to die?" Alex suspiciously walks over to the couch.

Stormy sits next to Alex and grabs her hand. "I'm truly sorry. You are new to this world and our ways are harsh. Hurting you was never my intention."

Alex looks away as she fights back a wave of tears.

Stormy gently pulls her face back to her, and they lock eyes. "I will protect your people."

"People have the ability to complicate things," Alex says.

"Not this time, you have my word," Stormy says.