

## Chapter 20

### Oathkeeper

Sage ignored that creeping feeling. She knew who it was, after all. It had only been a day, and his trail was everywhere.

Now that the opening ceremony had passed, she could wear something more comfortable; a red two split skirt over loose-fitting black pants. On top, she wore a sleeveless shirt that almost couldn't be justified in the mountain cold.

Her steps echoed on the marble stairs, as she took the left side of the steps, away from the carpet. She always hated the way it felt beneath her heels.

Before walking into the upper atrium, she glanced into a mirror and checked her hair, which was still tied into a comfortable ponytail on the back of her head; the way she preferred it.

One deep breath later, she opened the needlessly colossal doors into what was essentially a second keep stacked atop the first one.

This atrium, however, was much less packed than the one from the night before. Here, she was only greeted by other Oathkeepers.

"Oathkeeper Sage, there you are. Just in time, the meeting is about to start. Please, take your place at the mirror," Oathkeeper Star spoke, her tone threateningly sweet, as always.

Sage merely gave her a cordial nod and a quick smile, before moving into an adjacent, much darker room. The heart of the Keep; The Mirror.

It was a rather imposing room. The chamber itself was perfectly round, with a domed skylight overhead.

Back when she knew no better, Sage wondered why these meetings were always held around midnight. Now she understood.

She took her place at the moonpool, sitting in the middle of the room. She knelt down and sat on her knees, upon a rug that she had always found surprisingly comfortable.

She rested her hands in her lap as she glanced around the remainder of the room, where the pale moonlight clad everyone's faces in a gentle silver.

Ahead of her sat Oathkeepers Iris and Flow. At her sides sat Vigil and Veil, while she could not see the rest without rearing her head too far.

The silence was loud, but comfortable. There would be plenty of time to say what needed to be said. Everyone in the room had their agendas, that much was certain.

Maybe someone would get something out of all this, yet.

"Oathkeepers of the Bleeding Eye. Welcome to the annual council. As per usual, we will open this meeting according to tradition. Oathkeepers, place your hands in the water."

Oathkeeper delighted in the discomfort. She was, after all, the only one who had nothing to fear. Either way, the risk was calculated, and everyone else in the room did as demanded.

Sage was one of the first to go through with it, placing her palm in the frankly freezing moonpool and resting it on the slate bed.

She closed her eyes and let the feeling was over her; a stinging sensation that prodded and taunted her brain, until it relented and surrendered its memories.

With the release of her own, Sage could see into those of others.

She witnessed bustling cities and outstretched fields, a cabin somewhere in the woods, a refuge in the snow. She

saw sparking gunpowder and flashes of steel, among bargains struck and footsteps retraced.

She gained visions of artefacts acquired by the others; relics from another time. She saw the stars and the deepest of seas.

It was overwhelming, of course. No one in that room got more than a few glances. No one but Star.

"Thank you," Star purred, "then this council may commence. Shall we begin with the wyvern in the room?"

There was silence for a moment too long, when Iris spoke up, "Our operations in Coredam are proceeding smoothly. All quotas have been met and we are already working diligently on the next."

"Very good," Star hummed, before looking over at Sage, "What of the south?"

"Pacified, for now," Sage spoke succinctly, yielding only the information they wanted.

"Wonderful. What of the Peacekeeper project?"

Some glances were exchanged between Sage and those in front of her, when Iris spoke up again.

"I must admit that Knight Seer's efforts have been very... efficient, though I am concerned that they have been interfering in other sectors."

"Explain."

"Just last week, Raven issued a bounty on Accada's skull, kickstarted by Seer's brutish actions. He drove Raven into a corner and they acted."

"With all due respect," Sage interferred, "Is it not your domain to keep your birds on a tight leash?"

"There is only so much that can be done, when law enforcement riles them up like that."

Sage scoffed, "Then take control. Ever since Seer took the reins, our interests have never been safer."

"Sage speaks the truth," Veil muttered. "Aye!" Flow shouted from the other side of the room.

"I vouch for Sage. Ever since Seer's ascension, the Militia have been keeping to their docks. Their ships have gone MIA," Flow declared triumphantly.

Veil nodded, "Their turn to these new... Adversaries of theirs, have made them blind to our spectres."

"Then it seems that the boons outweigh the costs. It seems, Iris, that you might have to rethink your interest in the Collective. Either that, or you must find a way to realign yourself with Seer," Star concluded.

Iris scowled and snapped back at Star, "Seer is growing too powerful, too quickly. His stalkers are getting too loyal. Something must be done."

"Maybe, in that, you are right. Seer is effective, but his collar must be chained before he gets too out of hand," Star replied, drifting in thought.

"He cannot be extracted now, his foothold goes too deep," Veil hissed, "Our hastiness might startle him into going rogue."

"Seer wouldn't," Sage retaliated.

"Why are you so protective of him?" Iris questioned.

Sage scoffed, "I am not. I simply recognise an advantage when I see it. Uprooting Seer will only result in more cacophony. The solution is not to cripple him, but rather to remind him where his loyalties lie."

Another silence, this one longer than the last.

"Very well then," Star echoed through the chamber, "We will make him an Oathkeeper."

If looks could kill, the moonpool would have coloured red.

"Impossible," Veil snarled, "The man is effective, sure, but he is not worthy."

"Oathkeeper Star, are you sure-" Sage started, but Star cut her off.

"Last time I checked, this was no decision of yours to make, Oathkeepers. We will present him to Aval," Star declared.

"The Deep will decide his worth."