

This arc revolves around with a class S ESP Ssilen and the Gypsies guild.

[Hermit arc] [1] [Sslien] [9488]

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If there was one regret in my life, it was that I was born as a class S ESP.

At the same time, if there was ever a blessing for me, it was that I was a class S ESP.

Year 9488

“You are a class S,” An officer declared. Ssilen was at an ESP class certification center. Before turning 10 year-old, she was told to check in for an ESP classification test.

Not realizing the meaning of being a class S ESP, she replied indifferently, “Can I go home now then?”

She didn’t know how to react at first. But her parents were certainly happy. She would soon find out why.

The Bau approached her parents few days later, claiming that they were interested in “acquiring” services from their daughter. They were willing to take her into the clan and convert her to a Bau insider. Her parents would also be allowed to enter the clan as outsiders.

From the Bau’s point of view, it was crucial that they acquired Ssilen. They needed a class S ESP within their ranks. They still remembered the painful experience with

Cecil and shameful memories with the O'ren. It was all because of their lack of a class S ESP within their ranks.

Her parents were pleased with the deal. They would financially be supported for life. And their daughter would become an influential figure in the mighty Bau clan. Who wouldn't be happy?

Ssilen was nine years old at that time. And she did not like where it was going. Being a class S ESP, she was no fool even at that age. She felt somewhat clueless as the events unfolded swiftly before her eyes, but she knew that she did not like where it was going.

"This is going to be good for you," Her parents insisted when she spoke her mind that she did not want to join the Bau. She did not want her life to be set already at a mere age of nine.

Her parents insisted that it was good for her. What they did not tell her, at least upfront, was that it was better for them. Ssilen knew this by instinct and she had no intention of wasting her whole life for the sake of her parents.

Eventually, she ran away from home. She took nothing. All she had was clothes she was wearing.

Life was harsh for her as a runaway child. She starved for weeks. The only reason she survived was because she was an ESP.

Shortly after her disappearance, the Bau issued a planet-wide search warrant, and Ssilen was eventually captured in few weeks of time. Having received no training

at all as an ESP, she was easily taken down. Once it became clear that she had no way out, she gave up and did not say anything while she was being taken to a place unknown.

All of a sudden, the armored car she was taken into jolted weakly and then jolted again violently right after. The next she saw was blood spraying in a wild fashion from the driver. The car eventually crashed into a wall of a building nearby and the car was set on fire.

There were two other guards in the back seat she was on, and they seemed to have no idea what had just happened, either.

“Contact HQ!” One of them exclaimed. And the other guard quickly pulled out a comm. device with haste. However, that was as far as he could act before his head suddenly went missing. The other, only, surviving man screamed out loud and rushed out of the car, fleeing for life, but that didn’t last long as his head also went missing.

Ssilien, who was completely clueless as to what was happening, sat still on her seat silently. Even the fact that the car was on fire did not seem to make her move out of the car.

After a moment of uneasy silence, she heard approaching footsteps.

The someone said with a low tone, “Do you know where you stand?”

She slowly moved herself out of the car and faced one in a crimson robe. She was uncertain of gender due to his or her feminine features.

“Are you here to kill me?” She dared to ask. This was coming from a nine years old girl.

“If that is your wish, I have no reason to object.”

“I am too young to die,” She said with tears gathering up in her eyes. “But I don’t want my life to be tied down so early.”

“You have a point.”

Inhaling nervously, and still not knowing the true intention of the one who stood in front of her, she closed her eyes.

“If they sent you to kill me, so be it then. Strike me down.”

And she waited.

And waited.

“No, you will not die, at least not today.”

Shortly later, the strange one identified himself as Cecil Klisis. The Klisis clan was effectively defunct but with Cecil still alive and very kicking, the clan was still legally active. He offered her a shelter and Ssilen gladly accepted. The shelter was the former house of the Klisis in Manchester. The clan still maintained the ownership of the house on Earth. Cecil visited the empty house from time to time to check up on things. However, after the clash with the O’reu which had taken lives of all members, except for Cecil himself, he usually stayed in this manor, opting to visit Venus only when he had a business or when Illy O’reu called him.

“What will happen to my parents?”

“The Bau won’t kill your parents if that is your concern.”

“I am just wondering what will happen to them.”

“They sold you out from the look of it. The deal is now off obviously and your parents will probably be kicked out of the clan. They will probably face a harsher life from now on.”

“I see...”

“If you wish me to secure the future of your parents, it can be done.”

Ssilen shook her head firmly. “No. I will not see them again ever. They are no longer my parents as far as I am concerned.”

“So be it.”

Ssilen was free to roam within the house but wasn't allowed to go out. Cecil told her that it was for her own sake as the Bau was still seeking her out. She was mature enough to understand Cecil's reasoning and accepted it.

At first, she thought there were just Cecil and her in the huge and empty house but she saw another girl roaming around the house; it was Maeve. Cecil wasn't available most of times. Therefore, Ssilen spent most of her time with Maeve who didn't quite get along with her unfortunately. Maeve was mostly interested solitary activities.

It was one day. Cecil was present in the house, and Ssilen asked him a series of questions.

“It seems they call you the Crimson wizard. Why?”

They were in a luxurious garden where sun was brightly shining upon them. Cecil explained to her his clash with the Bau back in 8700s and another clash with the O'ren in 8800s.

Ssilen looked shocked genuinely and asked, “How can you be here? Shouldn't you be in a prison or something?”

“If I were under the laws, then yes, I would have been sentenced to life or worse. Fortunately, I am above the laws,” He replied indifferently.

For Ssilen, what Cecil told her was out of her understanding. She did not know what he meant by under the laws or above the laws at that time.

Year 9497, as Ssilen matured both physically and mentally, she started to understand Cecil more, and at the same time, she was increasingly against his methods. In other words, they did not see things eye to eye and she was becoming very uncomfortable dealing with Cecil. At this point, Cecil called Ssilen and told her to leave.

“You are 18 years old. You are an adult,” Cecil said while dipping his tea as usual in the backyard. “I’ve educated you and I believe you are now able to stand on your own.”

Ssilen took the news well. “So, you are kicking me out, right?”

“Let us be honest. You do not like how I do things. You want to leave, don’t you?”

Cecil’s statement hit the jackpot and Ssilen didn’t deny it.

“True, I want to get out of here. I haven’t even gone outside ever since I arrived here, which I don’t blame you for, but I do want to get out.”

Cecil quietly placed a cash card on table. “It is yours.”

Ssilen glanced at the cash card. “What is that for?”

“The least I can do for you. It’s not much but you should be able to start your life.”

Ssilen would glance at the card for a while but walked out without taking it.

“So be it,” Cecil said.

Being a class S ESP, teleporting away from Earth was a piece of cake. However, she did not know where to go for a while. Being raised on Moon, she soon decided to visit Moon.

Needless to say, her life wasn't exactly smooth. She had no formal education background and no business was willing to hire some random nobody with no background. She wasn't going to reveal that she was a class S ESP because doing so would attract the Bau's attention again. While she was confident that she could fend them off, she just did not want extra headache for nothing.

She was out on streets for weeks and hadn't even eaten anything for the same period. Being a class S ESP enabled to her go on without food and proper sleep, but she started to get cranky. She wanted to sleep on a comfortable bed and want to have some fried chicken which his mother used to make her since it was her favorite.

... She wondered how her parents were doing. But she had no idea where they were. She guessed they might have been kicked out back to Moon but trying to locate her parents without any information was literally trying to find a needle in space.

A season passed for her on streets and she found herself hanging out with street beggars. She was wearing a ragged hooded robe and her hands were dirty. She stayed in dark alleys between buildings and mostly acted at night to find food or whatever.

She had to do so in order to protect herself. Being in her prime age and being a female didn't bode well for her safety. Long story short, she had to take some measures to ensure her safety. Although she did not see things eye to eye with

Cecil, she wasn't naive enough to dismiss his teachings entirely because some of his words of wisdom made perfect sense no matter how much she twisted its interpretation.

Just because you are a class S ESP, you should not be using your powers in front of everyone. The more you demonstrate that you are powerful, the more jealousy you will earn from those who dislike you. Restrict your powers until you climb high enough to be able to suppress those who stand against you. Then, quite literally, go nuts.

Ssilen had a kick out of Cecil words as she recalled and looked toward the bright side of the street from inside of a dark alley she was taking her residence. There were few others more besides her who were simply sulking inside of their oversized hooded rags. It was not their time to act. They needed to wait until more people went to bed or "night" people referred. Ssilen knew this. They knew this.

It was an unspoken rule of the beggars; Avoid being seen if possible.

Hours later, there were significantly less people on streets and they, including Ssilen, knew their time had arrived. Without saying a word to each other, they stood up and swiftly walked out of the alley and then they spread out even before anyone on streets noticed.

As for Ssilen, she, like them, knew exactly where to go. It was back entrance of a popular restaurant. She dashed toward one of garbage cases and opened it violently, digging through food wastes to find something edible. Her swift movements and lack of hesitation indicated that she was quite used to this. After taking what she needed, she placed back any loose wastes and properly closed the case before leaving.

It was also another unspoken rule of the beggars; *leave little traces that you were there.*

When Ssilen arrived back at the alley, the others had already returned. Their sleeves were actually designed to be a pouch. Therefore, all they had to do was throw food into their sleeves and their earnings would stay there safe and sound.

They quickly put down their earnings on the ground and started to eat mindlessly until they were full. They were not allowed to store foods and any left overs were thrown into nearby garbage disposal units on streets. Nothing was allowed to rot and cause odor in open.

It's another unspoken rule they had; *Leave no food on streets. Leave no odor.*

Yes, they had rules. Yes, they had specially designed rags with modified sleeves that acted as pouches. Yes, they were beggars.

And no, they weren't ordinary run-of-the-mill beggars.

They were members of the Gypsy's guild.

How Ssilen ended up becoming one of them, she had no idea. She did choose to be a beggar for the time being but she had no realization that she had apparently joined the Gypsy's guild. It wasn't until she unintentionally attended one of their meetings.

An elderly man whose appearance was best described as a monk addressed a small crowd of beggars gathered around a large camp fire. They were having a meeting in an abandoned site and Ssilen was among them. She had no awareness that it was in fact a meeting until the man addressed the crowd.

“Hello, gypsies,” He told the crowd. “We have a matter that needs to be attended.”

Ssilen raised her hand to which he nodded at.

“What am I doing here?” She asked. Others looked at her with weird looks. But the monk-like man remained calm and answered her.

“You are currently attending a meeting of the Gypsies.”

“The Gypsies? What are they?”

“Look around you. You are looking at them, and you yourself are a gypsy also.”

“I am no gypsy, whatever it is.”

“You are here. Thus, you are a gypsy,” He said. His deep voice and his calm manner of speech made him sound like a preacher.

One of the beggars spoke out loud, "We are the gypsies. We are the beggars. We don't work. We don't make money. We beg. We sing. We enjoy what we have. We don't feel sorry for ourselves. We laugh if we want to. We cry if we want to. We enjoy our life as long as we can."

The monk-like man agreed with a firm nod.

The gypsies, those who enjoyed and took the world as is, those who observed the world from a distance, meddling in if they felt like or pretending to be silent observers if they felt like.

Ssilen had a choice to leave the meeting but she chose not to. No one stopped her. No one tried to persuade her to join them.

“Freedom is our motto,” The monk-like man proclaimed who later identified himself as Ed.

Ed was apparently a deputy leader of the Gypsies. They didn’t actually have a leader at that time. Ed explained that their previous leader passed away some years ago and they had yet to find a suitable hermit to replace.

After it was decided that Ssilen wasn’t going to leave, Ed continued to address the crowd.

“Gypsies, we have a problem. We have a hyper human running loose and mercilessly killing us. Now he isn’t doing this without a reason. In fact, he does have a valid reason,” Ed explained. “His wife was apparently raped to death by some group and the blame has been placed on us.”

“What class is he?” It was Ssilen who asked without raising her hand this time.

“A class A hyper human. He has been seen acting mostly on Creg’s and New Creg’s so far.”

It took Ssilen a moment to realize that he was talking about planets in Andromeda republic.

“That’s far away from here,” She remarked. “Just how many members does this guild have?”

“Hundreds of millions,” Ed replied her. “We do not have a formal roster however.”

“So, this guy is running around and killing only members of the Gypsies guild?”

Ed nodded at Ssilen’s statement, adding, “It is true that a group of homeless allegedly partook in the unfortunate incident, but there was no evidence to suggest that it was the work of our guild. In fact, it could have been anyone.”

“They must gain something from hunting you guys down then,” She said. “Ring any bells?”

Ed stared at Ssilen. "What is your name..., is it lass or madam?"

"Lass," She said. "And Ssilen."

"And what are you?"

Ed was asking whether she was an ESP or hyper human or an average human.

"ESP, class A," She lied.

"I myself am a class A ESP as well. Lass, I could use your assistance."

"You are talking as if you are going to Creg's? You do know how far it is from here, right? And I don't have a permit to go to other planets," She said.

Civilians needed permits to visit planets outside of their residence within Sol system. The only exception was Earth to Moon and vice versa travels. Ark politicians and officers in Navy were exempt to this rule.

"Lass, we are the Gypsies. We don't abide with rules that United Sol has created. We will smuggle ourselves to there."

Ssilen wasn't going to argue but she did not like the sound of smuggling herself to such a distance because it would mean a long period of uncomfortable living conditions. Granted, her life as a gypsy was hardly ideal but smuggling herself for over 60 days was something she felt she might have nightmares about.

"Lass?" Ed pressed for an answer.

"I don't want to go," She replied at last.

While Ed didn't seem surprised, there was a clear dissatisfaction on his face. Sighing, he asked Ssilen. "Do you mind telling us your reasoning behind your refusal?"

She answered earnestly since she felt trying to dodge the question would sound stupid. "I don't want to spend over 60 days in cold cargo bays."

Cargo bays carrying livestock had life support system in space. However, it was never properly maintained and it was often cold, damp, and dirty.

“Fair point, and the Gypsies guild does not enforce its members to do anything.”

And that was the end of their conversation. Ed continued his speech and informed the gypsies to be careful just in case.

Ssilen’s life went back to normal on surface. She spent daylight hours in dark alleys and went out for scavenging during night hours. She would occasionally overhear news about “the bug” causing more casualties. The bug was the codename for the hyper human that Ed talked about. And, at one point, she overheard that Ed was critically wounded by the bug.

What ifs, you will grow to hate it.

She gritted her teeth weakly in her hooded rag as she recalled more of Cecil’s words of wisdom. If she had gone with Ed, he wouldn’t have been wounded. Her first impression of him was good. He was pleasant to deal with and he was very understanding. Perhaps, she shouldn’t have refused. Perhaps, she should have gone with him.

Or rather, she should have perhaps just told him the truth about her class and used teleport to make the 60-day-long journey short.

What ifs.

It wasn’t all that hard to keep track of the bug’s whereabouts because, for somehow, the gypsies had a lightning fast network. She was told that the bug’s current location was Freebie and was even told that he was likely to end up on Freedom colony soon where Ed was being treated.

In the end, she decided to go to Freedom colony and it wasn't all that hard for her. She just had to teleport to there in one-go. She didn't need to smuggle herself through transports. She preferred convenience and efficiency, therefore if she had shortcuts, she never hesitated using them.

However, she was unable to teleport directly into the colony. A strange barrier stopped her from teleporting in. She ended up right outside of colony, meaning space, and she started to choke instinctively but did not die. It was just a very unpleasant experience to go through. She had to crawl around for hours before finally locating an open dock and dragged herself into it and then she had to wait for a ship to pass through for its internal docking door would open, at which point, she snuck into.

At the first taste of air, she passed out. Being in vacuum for hours and having to use her ESP to fortify her flesh to prevent rupture of blood veins and heart had been very stressing.

ESPs and hyper humans had an ability to stay alive in total vacuum of space for a limited period. How limited depended on their raw abilities. They would fortify their flesh to prevent rupture of veins and organs. For hyper humans, their time in space was limited by how long their body can sustain without oxygen, which was around ten minutes. For ESPs, they possessed abilities to stay in space for an extended length of time due to their ability to cast barrier and retain air and pressure within.

For Ssilen and this particular case, she had no time to retain air.

When she regained her consciousness, she found herself in a jail cell. She thought nothing of it and simply attempted to teleport away only to realize that she was stuck.

“I see you are awake.”

A voice sounded from a speaker somewhere in the cell.

“I found it hard to believe that yet another class S emerged. We IDed your face and your name is Ssilen, yes?”

She chose not to answer.

“I am not actually your enemy. My name is Lila and I am currently in charge of Freedom colony. On the ESP database, it says you are wanted by the Bau and also says you are a class A ESP. I assume the Bau chose not to reveal your true class for their own benefit.”

She still said no words.

“You don’t need to say anything because it’s not hard to figure out what happened. You were found by the Bau at age of 10, they wanted you. Somehow you lost them and nearly ten years later, here you are.”

Lila was correct except that she was taken in by Cecil.

“What I really want to know is whose side you are on.”

Finally, Ssilen chose to speak. “I am on no one’s side.” Again, she lied although it wasn’t too far from truth. “I’ve come here to help someone out.”

“And who are you trying to help?”

She wondered whether it was safe to reveal Ed’s name and lied, “Just a friend who needs my help.”

Lila insisted however. “The name?”

“Eddie.”

“The real name, I am asking.”

“The real name is Eddie.”

Then there was a short silence before Lila spoke. "We have no one by name of 'Eddie' residing on the colony. Care to explain that?"

Seeing she wasn't getting through, she decided to reveal the name and gamble.

"Fine, the name is Ed."

Lila answered after a moment. "I do not have anyone by that name here still."

"But I am speaking truth."

This time, there was a long silence.

Do you push or do you pull? Or you can do nothing.

"Listen," Ssilen raised her voice. "There is no way you can have everyone tracked by your database. There will be people who manage to smuggle themselves. Just like how I got in. I came here to help a friend and that is all there it is. I will smuggle myself out of here once I am done."

Lila responded and her tone remained unchanged. "When a class S ESP gets involved, it usually escalates. Unless you tell me what exactly is going on, I cannot let you go."

Ssilen scoffed and talked back, "Even if I tell you everything as you claim, you are unlikely to let me go anyway judging from the way you speak."

There was no further response from Lila and Ssilen was forced to stay confined for next few days during which she stayed low. Lila eventually talked to her again but in person this time.

Ssilen was on her jail bed when she heard sharp and bold high heel sound that was approaching to her location. The high heel sound eventually stopped in front of her jail cell and she lazily looked out.

“Who might you be?” Ssilen asked casually.

“I talked to you before. You should recognize my voice.”

“Yes, I do recognize that voice. She was a bitch to deal with.”

Ignoring Ssilen’s remarks, Lila continued, “I believe I know which ‘Ed’ you were talking about.”

“Oh, you do now?” She ridiculed.

“Ed of the Gypsies.”

“Yeppers.”

“They have been having some issues with a hyper human. I assume you’ve come here to help them with that.”

“Yes, yes, you are correct, detective.”

“I am willing you let you out under one condition. I want all of the gypsy members to leave once that little problem with theirs is over.”

“Pardon? I don’t have that kind of decision power. Hell, I am not even a member.”

Lila cross her arms. “If you are not one of them, who do you work for?”

“I work for myself. Is that good enough for you?”

“Very well, what do you gain from assisting them?”

Ssilen got herself out of the bed and approached Lila. “Friendship? Respect? Come on, what do you want from me? Just because I am a class S ESP, that does not make me a leader of those stinking beggars!”

Lila remained unconvinced but opened the cell door. "Fine, go and do your thing. But leave as soon as you are done. I am only letting you go because I don't want some murderer on loose. It gives us a bad reputation."

"Well, duh, thanks!" Growling, Ssilen walked out of the jail.

"You can use teleportation now," Lila explained. "The barrier system doesn't cover outside of jails."

Without answering, Ssilen simply teleported away.

It was easy for her to find Ed. All she had to do was ask a beggar.

Ed was found in what appeared to be center of complex alleys. It was dark and damp, and Ed was being treated on a makeshift bed made of paper wastes. Since Ed was a class A ESP, he did not need sophisticated medical treatments. He just needed bandages and some antibiotics. There were few gypsies who were guarding the area. They were alert upon seeing Ssilen but did not stop her from approaching Ed who was awake.

"Hello, Ed," Looking down, Ssilen greeted him casually.

Ed's pale and thin face indicated that he had been badly fed and treated. "Lass...," He barely managed to speak. "Surprised ... to see ... here..."

"Doesn't the guild have other ESPs or hyper humans? You can't be the only class A ESP?"

"There are ... more ... Hard to contact them however..."

Sighing, Ssilen told him bluntly, "Fine, I will take care of the bug. You are going to owe me."

"Lass..., he is ... a class A hyper human... and he is ... highly experienced and full of ... rage ..."

“I am a class S ESP,” She declared. “A class A will not be a match for me. The bug will be roasted.”

Ed’s eyes opened widely. He tried to speak but started to cough instead. The gypsies who were standing guard approached him swiftly. But Ed gestured that he was going to be fine.

“Just focus on healing, old man,” Ssilen told him bluntly. “I will see you after the bug is dead. By the by, how many has he killed so far?”

“42,” One of the gypsies answered her.

“He deserves to die then,” Ssilen replied.

“He warned us where he is going to attack next time. You could just wait there.”

“I see. Show me where that is.”

Ssilen was led to an alley where there were tens of hooded beggars sulking. It was also behind a big restaurant which meant they were waiting for the restaurant employee to take their daily food waste out.

“He warned us that he is going to attack here next,” The gypsy who led Ssilen told her.

“And they are still here?” Or have you not told them?”

“They know but they are staying here regardless. This is one of the prime spots for quality food.”

“Doh,” Ssilen uttered.

“Excuse me now. I must go back to my post.”

Ssilen approached the beggars and informed them that the bug was going to attack them in near future. However, none of them bothered to move away.

“Up to you, it’s your life,” Muttering, Ssilen sat in a shadowed corner.

Freedom colony had real day and night unlike Moon where the only defining point of day and night was time. As time clocked at 6 PM locally, artificial sky started to drench in twilight colors and it became darker and, by 7 PM, it became night at which point, a restaurant employee took out two big black bags of food waste. The beggars remained silent and still while the employee placed the waste bags into waste crates carefully. He didn’t mind the presence of beggars one bit and went back.

After a good few seconds, the beggars dashed toward the waste crates, opening and digging into food wastes. Normally, Ssilen would have joined them but she wasn’t in mood and she had a job to do as well.

The day went by without appearance of the bug. In fact, days went by.

The beggars, as usual, dashed toward the food crates after an employee took out trash. At the same time, a man stood at the entrance of the alley.

“Pitiful scoundrels!” He exclaimed with a sneer. “You have no place in the society.”

He was about 6t tall and had a fairly thin physique. Because of shadow, Ssilen was unable to determine his facial features but he seemed to be wearing black leather pants and jackets.

Turning his energy blade on, he dashed toward the beggars who were too busy digging through the food wastes to run or even dodge. He showed no hesitation in cutting them down and two beggars were fatally wounded as they fell backwards. The other beggars silently attempted to tend the wounded, trying to size their massive bleeding by simply applying pressure. They showed little fear about their impending doom as the bug walked toward them. When he raised his blade to slash, his raised arm was enveloped in flame.

“What the?!” Uttering, he took his leather jack off and threw it away. “Who’s there?!”

Ssilen came out of shadow. “You must be the bug. I am here to finish you,” She declared.

He let out of a laugh. “Hah! The gypsies hired an ESP!”

“Let’s see how long you can laugh.”

Ssilen was a class S ESP specialized in fire. She had an access to what Cecil called “Hellfire” which was black fire that was capable of consuming matters instead of typically burning.

She aimed her index finger at him and tiny fire balls started to fire at him which he deflected or at least try to. The tiny fireballs exploded as soon as they came in contact with his energy blade and started to give burns on his skin. Since deflecting appeared to be futile, he instead started to dodge.

“Can you still laugh now?” Ssilen ridiculed him and he talked back.

“You bitch!” He dashed swiftly sideways and started to run on a wall to get around Ssilen. Since he was a hyper human, he had a much faster speed and reflex, and even before Ssilen could turn around, he was already behind her. He attempted to break her neck but his hands came in contact with black fire and his fingers were gone before he knew what happened.

His eyes filled with doubts. His fingers were gone but there was no blood. His hands looked as if he never had fingers to begin with. He had never seen anything like so before, let alone black fire. Having lost fingers, therefore losing the ability to wield his blade, he jumped back and stared at his fingerless hands for a moment before he turned around and fled.

“You aren’t going anywhere!” Ssilen bellowed as a fire whip expanded at lightning speed from her hand and grappled his neck. Immediately, he started to choke and, because he lost all of his fingers, his desperate attempt to free himself looked awkward.

The fire whip slowly started to burn his shirt as he was being forcefully dragged back to Ssilen.

“So, what do you have to say for yourself?” Sneering, Ssilen spoke. She wasn’t exactly asking him who was choking and being burnt alive at the same time.

“Wh...atever...,” He managed to get a word out before he passed out.

A fool picks a side after hearing only one side.

A proper man picks a side after hearing both sides.

A wise man never picks a side. He makes his own side.

When he woke up, Ssilen was standing before him and he found himself in a circle of black fire. He thought he was dreaming but looking at his fingerless hands, he realized this was no dream.

Laughing hysterically, he spoke aggressively, “What now, bitch? Should have simply killed me.”

Ssilen placed one of her hands on her waist and spoke, “What’s your story? I doubt you started to kill the beggars just because you suddenly wanted.”

He shrugged. “I thought you knew the story? My wife was killed by them, so I am killing them. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

“Yes, I know that story but there must be more.”

“There is nothing more. I am going to kill them until I am stopped.”

“... You do know where you stand now, don’t you? Your life is about to end. What is your name by the way?”

He shrugged again. “Ninno is the name, and yes, I do know where I stand.” Slowly, he got up. “This black fire... Is it the same thing that took my fingers away?”

Ssilen responded with a nod. "Yes, it is called Hellfire. It consumes matters and returns them to nothingness."

Ninno beamed a peaceful smile. "Good, finally, at last, I shall be free from this nightmare."

"What are you-" Even before Ssilen could finish or even react, he attempted to walk out of the circle and his body was enveloped by black fire. In seconds, his body crumbled like a sand castle would and his black ashes vanished into thin air.

Ssilen was loss at words and was vacantly staring at the black circle that had just consumed Ninno. While she did intend to kill him, this wasn't how it was supposed to end. She wanted to bring him to the judgement of the Gypsies. She was going to take him to Ed and let him decide what to do.

Sighing, she stared at the circle that was slowly vanishing. She felt she could hear Ninno's laughter in the air.

"You won this round, mister," Ssilen talked to herself.

Ssilen returned to Ed and made her report.

She added after the report, "The guy was looking for a chance to die. Needless to say, he took his chance to die gladly without hesitation. He had the last laugh, so he won, I lost."

Ed took the news well. He was honest that he couldn't care less whoever was a winner. "I care not who wins, lass. What matters is that the bug has been taken care of and the Gypsies are safe for now."

“I’ve been meaning to ask. I did ask you before back on Moon but you dodged my question. Do some gain something by harassing the Gypsies? They look harmless to me.”

Ed beamed a smile. It wasn’t directed at anyone in particular. “We are a sore sight to civilizations. We represent failures of a society.” He coughed and continued. “Now, I am not saying we actually are but that is how we are being perceived by others.”

“Is that why the rules are in place?”

Ed weakly shook his head and answered, “I do not think so. The rules have been in place for as long as this guild existed. We don’t know why the rules are there. We just know they exist and we, therefore, try to abide by the rules.” He took a deep breath and let it out. He did it few times before continuing. “Lila at Freedom colony wants us out at all cost. She has valid reasons but we aren’t about to move out just because of her idealism.”

Ssilen muttered, “I ran into her. She was a bitch to deal with.”

“So, lass.” Ed changed the subject. “Does your assistance mean that you accept being a member of the Gypsies? I ask you because the guild could use someone like you right now. We could use a leader who’s a class S.”

“Woah, wait, what?” Ssilen freaked out. “The leader of the Gypsies?”

Ed chuckled. “Being a leader of the Gypsies means literally nothing. There is no privilege. There will be no recognition. You don’t get paid. And well...” He made a pause. “I suppose there is some money in it.”

“I thought being penniless was what the Gypsies guild was about?”

Ed smiled, and this time, his smile was directed at Ssilen who was looking down at him. “Money talks, lass. The guild maintains a small line of credit for occasions that demand it. I shall hold onto the access to the bank account for now however.”

“Hah,” She uttered and complained. “So, you don’t trust me.”

Smiling, Ed responded, "Not yet and you cannot blame me for that."

Ssilen agreed, "True enough."

After Ed made his recovery, he made an announcement that Ssilen had been chosen to become the new leader of the Gypsies, and there was no reaction from any of them. There were probably close to a hundred beggars where Ed called for a gathering and none of them was neither congratulating nor rejecting her. They simply sat there and vacantly stared at Ssilen for a moment and acted as if they were falling asleep.

"What great reactions," Ssilen remarked with a crooked grin.

"You need to understand that they aren't exactly interested in politics," Ed replied. "They probably gathered here because I secretly let out a word that we are giving out a free meal at the meeting."

Ssilen's cheek was twitching. "Great..." She muttered.

As promised, Ed distributed the free meal he promised and this was the only moment when they became lively.

"They may have not shown any interest in your appointment, but the words will spread," Ed added.

The first thing Ssilen did as the new leader of the Gypsies was testing their so-called lightning network. She asked members to search for her parents. She gave them description of their appearance and that was all she needed to do and even before 24 hours passed, they apparently found where they lived.

"Holy smokes," She exclaimed with awe. "That is fast. I mean this is surreally fast."

Her parents were found on Moon as she expected. They appeared to be living in a small one room apartment. They also noted that their living standards were poor.

Her face progressively darkened as she read through the report that was written on back of a rag that a beggar was wearing. He was apparently acting as a messenger.

“Good job, you may go.” The beggar nodded without turning back and simply dashed away into a nearby alley.

What ifs, you will grow to hate it.

Ssilen gritted her teeth and growled silently. She pondered what might have happened if she chose to accept her life that her parents chose at that time. Would it have been better for her? Would it?

She had no idea and she would never know. At the moment, she was on a crossroad. She had two choices. She could pay a visit to her parents or she could simply move on. She did recall telling herself that she would never see him again, but that was when she was only nine years old and a decade passed.

The fried chicken her mother used to make her...

She decided to pay her parents a visit.

Teleporting herself to Moon from Freedom colony, she headed to an apartment complex that her parents were reported to be seen. She wasted no time and went straight to their place. In truth, she was excited to see her parents again and wasn't thinking much other than trying to see them as soon as possible.

She pressed a door bell and she waited. She felt she heard rumbling and the door creaked as a middle-age woman opened the door.

“Who is it?” She asked. Her voice lacked vigor and she looked very thin. Her placid face turned hostile. “Who is it?!” She exclaimed.

She had every right to be on alert. After all, Ssilen was wearing a hooded rag... Realizing that she was actually wearing a hooded rag, she quickly pulled the hood down.

“Mom, it’s me!”

It took the woman a while to realize what Ssilen was saying. However, instead of being happy to see her daughter, her face remained hostile, if not worse.

Glaring at Ssilen, she raised her voice. “What do you want from us now? Haven’t you done enough?”

“Whoa?” Ssilen had no idea what was going on. “What are you talking about? I came to see you. What have I done wrong?”

“You mean you don’t know?!” She pointed at Ssilen aggressively and shouted at her. “You ran out on your own parents! Your father had a fine career but he was fired after you ran out on us!” Her voice became only angrier. “The Bau blocked your father’s career and he could not find a proper job anywhere else!”

Ssilen didn’t know what to say and her mother continued to vent her angry words at her.

“Because you ran out on us!” She yelled. “We were doing it for your future! You could have become a Bau insider!” She eventually withdrew her finger and crossed arms. “What do you do now? What is up with that dirty rag?”

“I am with the Gypsies!” Ssilen answered proudly. “I am actually the leader of the Gypsies!”

“The Gypsies?” Her mother looked confused at first but soon she sneered at her. “You mean you are a beggar.” Her face was visibly getting redder. “You ran out on us and this is what you’ve become?!” Her voice was getting louder and louder.

“You ran out on us just to end up being a god damned beggar?! Are you fucking serious?!”

Ssilen was struck back. She couldn't talk back because she felt her mother was right. A leader of beggars... Laughable indeed, she agreed with her in her mind. In fact, she felt utterly stupid for declaring out proudly that she had become a leader of beggars.

“Mom, I...” Still Ssilen tried to talk to her because she was glad to see her. “I am just glad to see you...” Tears were forming in her eyes. “I just wanted to...”

Alas, her mother wasn't on the same line of thoughts. “I am NOT glad to see you!” She yelled. “I am glad your father is away right now, because if he was here, he might have passed out from high blood pressure!”

“Mommy~,” A child's voice sounded from inside. “Mommy, who's at door?”

Her harsh voice suddenly turned charming. “It's no one, darling. I will be with you soon.”

Yes, that voice... That voice was what she remembered her with... Tears dropped through Ssilen's cheek and her mother scoffed at the sight.

“Serves you right,” She told her harshly. “Now, I don't know how you found us here. But please do not come here ever again. Don't bother us. You are not my daughter as far as I am concerned. Even legally you are not my daughter.”

Shell shocked, Ssilen stood still with tears flowing out of her eyes. She was seeing nothing, hearing nothing, and sensing nothing. And scoffing at her again, her mother turned around and slammed the door shut.

What ifs, you will grow to hate it.

Ssilan started to sob and then cried soon after. Nothing was going through her mind other than what ifs. She never considered what she had done was wrong. She did not want her life to be tied down so earlier in her life and chose to stand up for her own future. In doing so, she made sacrifices. What she didn't realize at that time of her decision was its consequences.

What if she hadn't become the leader of the Gypsies?

What if she refused to be taken in by Cecil?

What if she didn't run away from the Bau?

What if she wasn't born as a class S ESP?

What if she wasn't born at all?

What ifs...

Fin