

This is actually a side story and is one of very few that deal with the Ra clan.

[Masu arc] [3] [3Ra Syndicate] [8625]

Rev 1.1

3Ra Syndicate, it was what held the nebula pirates together.

The nebula ..., it was the ultimate hideout for hardened criminals. Ever since Sol system was fully established, criminals who needed to hide completely fled to the nebula.

The beginning of "the nebula pirates" begun with the Ra family. The Ra family was accused of rebellion and was exterminated.

This part of history was also how the Bau family became how they were in the main plot of Two Clusters. The Bau and the Ra were rivals at one point.

Year of 4198, after annihilation of the Ra family by the Bau, there were only three survivors of the Ra. They had stolen a mammoth class freighter and headed random deep space to die.

The three Ra survivors became later are known as "The 3Ra" or "The three founding fathers".

A mammoth class freighter was the largest ship available that time. In fact, as far as its sheer size was concerned, it was one of the largest ships ever built by mankind.

It was a pure coincidence that they sailed into the nebula. Mankind had yet to explore or even discover the nebula at this time.

The nebula made any kind of sensor futile. And constant chemical reactions in the nebula made a ship's hull degrade gradually. When they sailed into the nebula, they were prepared to die. They just did not want to be killed by the Bau.

After entering the nebula, their ship's hull degraded gradually. They thought that it'd be their end until they miraculously reached a spot where there were no chemical reactions. It was a very small spot, but was enough for the mammoth to park safely. This was how the 3Ra syndicate began. Being engineers themselves, the Ra brothers quickly modified the ship to be a makeshift outpost. Luckily for them, the ship was carrying food and minerals.

It didn't take long enough for them to change the ship into a full outpost. They rescued random criminals who happened to sail into the nebula over years and population increased over time. Eventually, the three Ra brothers created "The 3Ra syndicate". Using the nebula as their primary protection, the syndicate grew rapidly. The three Ra brothers also developed a limited sensor that worked within the nebula.

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Year 8625.

One of the Ra's descendent, Olne Ra was speaking to his daughter, Kakari Ra in his office.

"There was a talk about your arranged marriage. Apparently, Marcus from the Dietrich is interested in you," He said, having his fingers crossed against his chin.

"Is that so?" Kakari seemed calm despite of a fact that her future was about to be decided. "Why Dietrich?"

"We need the mineral. United Sol doesn't sell us minerals since they don't even acknowledge our existence. Andromeda republic doesn't sell us anything, either.

Freedom colony sells us minerals, but the price tag is too high. Our import routes are mostly illegal and right now our economy has met its golden age. We need minerals."

Kakari was a proud woman. She was proud to be Ra. She was proud to be a woman. She was even proud to be a victim for an arranged marriage for the sake of the Ra. Glory she wanted and glory she was about to receive by sacrificing herself to be a victim.

"Will we ever get our revenge? You know, the Bau."

Olné shook his head. "Now is not the time for this, Kakari."

"I understand," She nodded. "I will follow your decision. I do want to see how this 'Marcus' looks like though."

"Of course," He opened his drawer and picked up a small photo. "Here you go."

She looked at the picture. The man looked fragile but was good looking. After a short moment, she said, "Fine, I will marry him."

"Thank you, Kakari," Olné stood up from his desk and bowed earnestly to his daughter.

Kakari needed some time to think. Even though she gave out her answer rather quickly, the fact still remained that she was going to get married to a man she hadn't even met at all. As she left Olné's office, a man hailed her.

"What's up?"

It was Iusen Ra, the son of Aizen Ra. Aizen Ra was Olné Ra's younger brother, so Iusen Ra was Kakari's cousin.

"Hi," Kakari beamed a smile at him. They had known each other since childhood. Thus, they got along very well. They were more like a brother and a sister.

"Nothing much, I'd say."

"Yeah? I have something though."

Kakari twisted her head curiously. "What?"

He took out something from his pocket. "I've got the newest handcom!" Iusen was explaining what new feature was added to it and so on. Kakari was nodding along, but wasn't really listening. She had something bigger to worry about.

Handcom was a relic. It had already faded away thousand years ago. However, having been isolated for many generations, handcom still existed for 3Ra Syndicate.

After returning to her quarter, she dragged her chair to a small window that her room had and turned it around before she sat on it. Leaning her chest on back of the chair, she gazed through the window.

"Nebula is sure pretty on surface...," she mumbled as she fell into deep thoughts in silence.

The Ra family had developed a type of alloy which was highly resistant to harmful elemental of the nebula. However, it was not absolute. In the nebula, sailing a big ship was a suicide. In the nebula, smaller was better. Except the 3Ra outposts, everything else was small. The outpost over thousands years grew much larger in its mass. Furthermore, more outposts were built throughout the nebula. Outposts required constant attention to its surface since even their special alloy degraded gradually, just at slower rate.

Thankfully, the nebula was full of resources. Therefore, repair material hadn't been an issue until recently.

The population of the 3Ra syndicate had exceeded two millions. Although most of population was consisted of hardened criminals, it was their last course of action to flee into the nebula.

Therefore, most were willing to start over. They didn't want troubles anymore, just a new life in peace. And the Ra family provided it. The 3Ra syndicate provided them jobs. Their jobs were pirating and mining. Once in a while, a group of fighters would be organized and go on a raid on trade routes. Those who no longer wanted actions had another choice: mining. It was a boring task; it was better than nothing though. Mining no longer required physical efforts. Machines did all the hard tasks. The job was a simple as watching over controls and making sure that nothing went out of play.

Days passed, Kakari was told by Olné that Marcus would visit the outpost soon to finalize the arranged marriage proposal. The whole thing had been stressing her a bit. She felt like having some action to vent her stress. Therefore, she organized a group of fighters and went on a raid.

"M'lady, where would you like to go this time?"

"Hello, Grent. So, I see that you've joined up this time," Kakari said.

"I am sorry about the last raid. I had a personal business to take care of."

"No problem. Let's hit the Pluto-DC route."

Grent was a seasoned veteran pirate who served the syndicate for most of his life. He fled to the nebula when he was young and arrived at the 3Ra station.

"You heard the lady, let's have some fun!"

Cheering was heard from the channel. There were many trade routes around Pluto. The routes were named Pluto-AA,AB,AC and so on. The DC route was one

of the least used route and sometimes valuable freighters chose this route for higher safety rating.

Kakari's gang arrived at Pluto-DC route after 2 weeks. Nebula pirate fighter crafts had an additional compartment where its pilot would stay for long voyages. The compartment was basically a small one room with essentials such as a toilet and a food dispenser module. It also had a small storage module.

"Nothing on sensor, m'lady." said Grent.

"We are heading to DD route," Kakari replied instantly.

When they arrived at Pluto-DD route, few freighters were spotted. Few escort ships were guarding them.

"Attack!" Kakari shouted. "Destroy the escorts!"

The battle didn't last long. It was done within an hour. After destruction of escorts, the freighters surrendered.

"Lady, SOS signal is being detected right now." Grent reported.

The nebula pirates had a code. It was not a written rule. It was more of their moral rule that, if freighters didn't send out SOS signals, they would go easy on captured crew. They sometimes even let them go freely. But, if SOS signal was detected, they'd be harsh on captured crew. They'd even kill them in the worst case.

Kakari was stressed at the moment. She was reliving her stress by pirating. As Grent reported that SOS signal was detected, she gritted her teeth.

"What? How dare they! I am going in!"

Fighter-class ships of the nebula pirate had a special ability. It was to punch a hole on ship's hull and secure an entry to inside of ships. Kakari's fighter attached itself on a hull of a freighter and drilled a hole. Being a hyper-human, she grabbed her blade and rushed to their bridge. As she knocked off thick metal doors, she yelled. "Prepare to die!"

Without giving them any chance, she began to slash on anything that moved. The crew on bridge was average human beings. They had no way to escape from a hyper-human with intent to kill.

"Lady!" Grent rushed in and tried to stop Kakari. But Grent ended up losing an entire arm to Kakari's energy blade. She raised her eyebrow as she saw her own blade cut through Grent's left shoulder and regained herself.

"Ah...," She dropped her blade in panic. "Grent! I am so sorry!"

Grent moaned with pain. "I am fine, m'lady. I am glad you regained yourself," Grent told her in a labored breath. Kakari turned around to see what she had done. Seven corpses she saw. Two crewmen who were alive were in a corner holding together, shaking, and one of them had peed on his pants.

Kakari sighed deeply. "My damned temper...," She turned around to face Grent again. "I will ask my father to regenerate your arm for free."

"Thank you, m'lady," His left shoulder was spouting blood, but his voice was calm. It was easy to tell it wasn't his first time losing an arm or two.

When she returned to the outpost, Olne had summoned her. She expected to be scolded for her reckless behavior.

However, all Olne told her was to be more careful next time. She was puzzled at the moment and soon she realized why. She was soon to be Dietrich. There was no "next time" for her.

Next day, she requested for a mission.

"Mission, you say?" said Olne. "Why?"

"No reason, I just want to do something."

Olne was quiet for a minute before he spoke. "I do have a mission, but it is not for the Ra. It is for the Dietrich. Is that alright with you?"

"Depending on what kind of mission it is, I suppose."

Olne sighed. "Apparently, one of their servants has eloped with a woman of the Bau. They are residing in the Freedom colony."

"How shameful. Doesn't the Dietrich have discipline?"

Olne ignored Kakari's comment and went on. "Your primary object is to kill this servant's woman and secretly protect the male from the Bau's dogs."

"Why not kill the servant?"

"The Bau wants the male dead and the Dietrich wants the female dead. You know how it is."

Yes, she knew. Since the Bau wanted the male dead, the Dietrich would want the opposite.

"So, will you accept?"

"It sounds like fun. Yes, I accept," Kakari replied firmly.

"Take a transport shuttle and head to the colony. You are allowed to bring ten men for this mission."

Kakari nodded and turned around to leave. When door opened and Kakari was about to leave Olne's quarter, he stopped her.

"This is to be your last mission. After this, you..." Kakari stopped Olna and said, "I know."

She quickly assembled a group of ten men. While she was preparing to leave, Iusen Ra visited her.

"Haven't you heard? I heard there is an arranged marriage for you!" He sounded shocked as he rushed into her quarter.

Kakari nodded. "Yes, I know. I accepted the deal."

"I can't believe this!" He was shouting. "Are you just going to accept such a fate?"

"I accepted." Kakari's voice was calm.

"I don't believe this!" He kicked something on ground and left. She didn't understand why he would be so mad. Not thinking much into it, she resumed packing her essential stuff for the mission.

After gathering ten skilled men, she moved out.

Gazing through a window in a passenger seat, Kakari was enjoying her favorite view, the nebula. The universe is quiet. The nebula, however, is not. Constant lighting and quaking makes traveling in the nebula unpleasant. But, for her, being in the nebula was more comfortable than being in mere space where it was too quiet.

"Ever changing colors...", She mumbled. "Ever changing sounds..."

She recalled one of her childhood memories. There was time when she was afraid of the lighting and quaking caused by the nebula. She locked herself in her room and would cry of fear. Someone unlocked the door to her room manually and entered. She panicked. She could not recognize who it was, but she clearly remembered what he said to her.

"Machines have their own sounds. Humans have their own sounds. Universe has its own sounds. Nebula has its own sounds as well. Can't you understand their whispers? You are the Ra. The Ra understands the nebula."

"The Ra ... understands the nebula....," She mumbled again. She closed her eyes and thought nothing. Thunders and quakes were felt through her skin and her ears. Her senses soon picked up a strange rhythm. It was the rhythm she had been hearing ever since she was a child.

'I know you....'

"Do you?" She whispered.

'I do...'

The strange rhythm somehow translated into her own language. At one point of her life, she thought she was insane due to this.

"Even if I may not carry the name, Ra, anymore soon, that does not mean I am not one of the Ra...," She had little tears in her eyes. "The nebula is my life. It is my friend. It is my music."

After a moment of silence, she whispered yet again. "I swear... I will come back."

Kakari arrived at Freedom colony after six weeks of journey. She had brought ten men with her to finish the job. Her task was simple on paper at least. She needed to kill a woman named Affie.

"All documents seem to be in order..."

A docking bay personal was checking Kakari's documents to enter Freedom colony. He double-checked every document she had provided.

"Um..., everything seems to be in order..."

Kakari put her hand on her waist. "Yes, they are. Are you letting us in or not?"

"Uh...," He hesitated, but he eventually approved their entry.

Leaving docking bay, one of her men told her.

"They know what we are here for."

Kakari nodded and said, "Go scout the area. Find where our target is."

Quickly, her men spread out. She was left alone. Slowly, Kakari looked around, her surroundings seemed rather peaceful and joyful. She was not used to such; she wasn't used to peace and joy. Being a nebula pirate, everything she needed was an adrenaline injector to keep herself fresh.

Frowning and even growling silently, she scoffed at a peaceful sight of the colony.

Hours passed, and her men returned with necessary information.

"She lives in an apartment. It's not even far from here."

"We will wait," Kakari responded. "We will kill her after the artificial sun goes down."

For her and everyone else in her team, it was a dreadful wait until night. They were professional in what they do, but like Kakari, they weren't used to peace. Their eyes began to be filled with life as it started to become dark. They were already at the apartment where their target resided. They weren't alone though. Another group ... was there.

"I see Azzazel and Vnil," Kakari whispered to her group. "The Bau's dogs. I don't know the third guy."

Kakari and her group remained still in shadow, watching Vnil to chase her target. Azzazel remained on ground level.

They were obviously on their mission and she chose to wait for a window of opportunity. Shortly later, a figure ran into the building as well.

“Having fun, I see,” She remarked.

It took a while but eventually Vnil came down with her target in his arms.

Kakari's men were about to go in but were stopped by her.

"Not yet," She whispered. "Not ... yet."

When Azazzel clapped, Kakari gave a signal to her men and dashed forward. Even before Azazzel could react, her high kick knocked him out at once.

“Kakari here!” She declared out loudly. “Men, we need that woman!” She added, “Don’t kill them. They aren’t even Bau.”

Vnil was forced to release Affie when he was being cornered by Kakari’s men.

“We have the woman, your ladyship.”

Minghua dashed toward them just as they seized unconscious Affie but he was stopped by Kakari.

“Get the fuck off!” She shouted as she dodged Minghua’s slash and gave him a good punch in his abdomen. However, instead of recoiling, he managed to hit her in the chest with his blade handle.

“Ugh!” Kakari recoiled, taking several steps back.

“Your ladyship! She has woken up!” The men informed her. They showed no intention to meddle in her affairs however.

She could tell that the situation could get ugly and decided to conclude her mission as soon as possible. She shouted, “We just need her head! Behead her!”

“Yes, your ladyship!”

“No, you will not do that!” Minghua dashed toward the men only to be intercepted by Kakari.

“Oh, they will!” However, Kakari was suddenly blown away by a gust of string wind. “What the?!” She yelled.

“Affie!” It was Masu who was dashing toward to the scene.

“Your ladyship!”

“What the fuck is it now?!”

Two men were attacking her men. They were holding them fine but she feared it would definitely get worse when Azazzel wake up. And her fear became reality too soon when he regained consciousness.

Shaking off his concussion, Azazzel took few deep breaths and shook his head. Clearing his throat right after, he demanded. “Who are you!”

“I am Kakari Ra!”

He uttered, “The Ra?! What the hell?!”

“Give her back!” Masu demanded.

Kakari took a deep breath and judged the situation. There was no way she could take on all those hostiles at the same time. However, she just needed to earn time while her men finish beheading her. She had ten men with them and they were a mix of class B and A hyper humans. They were all highly trained and she was confident that they would be able to hold them off.

She was confident and it showed on her face.

“Done beheading her yet?!”

“Your ladyship, she ...”

“What!” Frustrated, she looked back and found Affie bleeding from her nose, ears, and eyes. She was overexerting and was hardening her flesh. A blade was on her throat but wasn’t making its way through.

Masu screamed as he saw Affie overexerting. He dashed but was stopped by Kakari. Minghua rushed in to assist Masu but again was stopped by Kakari. She was being defensive. She simply needed to earn time.

Masu decided to reason with her instead. “What has she done to deserve this?!”

Kakari sneered off his question and told him, "Who the fuck cares? I've been given an order to do this and I am not about to fail my last mission for the Ra!"

"Don't do this!" Vnil shouted out of desperation. "She's pregnant!"

Masu's eyes widened and uttered, "She's ... what?"

"She's pregnant! You can't do this!" Vnil repeated.

"So?" Kakari looked genuinely uninterested. Shrugging, she turned her upper body to point at Affie whose bleeding was getting worse by moments. "Behead her!"

For her, completing her mission was the only thing it mattered. Nothing else mattered. She was a ruthless person and saw very little values in lives. She did, however, value those who were loyal to her.

Realizing that reasoning with her was out of options, Masu got on his four and started to beg.

"Please! Behead me instead! Please!" He cried out, "Please!"

Kakari laughed pleasantly, having the whole situation under her complete control. She loved it. "No, sir, no. I wasn't ordered to kill you. I was ordered to kill her."

"Who gave you that order?!" Masu shouted back.

Affie was losing consciousness and her hardened flesh was coming softer. The blade was getting through.

"No! No! Someone... Somebody... Please help!"

As things stood, Kakari was going to complete her mission.

And then a voice, a voice sounded amid the strong tension.

"Who was the one asked for my help?"

Kakari had a hair raising sensation all over her body when he heard the cold voice and her attention was fixed at the person who was walking toward the scene.

She was unable to identify the person. All she could tell was that he or she had a very eerie aura and that the person was wearing a robe. Her instinct was telling her to stay far away. However, she had a mission to do.

The person walked casually toward her men. She knew she had to help them but she was occupied.

And he casually killed two of her men. They were hardened fighters. Even against a class S, she felt they would stand a chance.

Or so she thought.

“Y, your ladyship!”

Crap, she thought. Where it went wrong, she thought.

Gritting her teeth, Kakari bit her lips. “Abandon the woman! Withdraw!” And she jumped off to a roof of a nearby building and her men followed, leaving Affie bleeding on the ground. Azazzel and Vnil attempted to reach her but they were stopped by Masu and his companions.

Kakari wasn't going to just flee. She was going to accomplish her mission in one way or another. It was a tactical retreat.

She reached out her boots and pulled out a small carry pistol but it had an unusually long barrel for its size. She manually inserted what appeared to be a dart and aimed at Affie who was being hugged by Masu at the moment.

Aiming, she fired and Affie was soon hit by it.

It was a specially engineered dart. It had a small dose of explosive at its rear. The needle hit Affie perfectly on her back and exploded inside of her flesh.

"I've injected her with lethal poison! She will not live..."

Her words were cut by a sudden turn of an event. She suddenly found both of her hands missing from where they would have been. She didn't know what

happened and simply stared at both of her empty limbs. At the very moment, there was no blood and there was no pain.

Gradually, her face started to fill with doubts and pains, and blood spouted out of her limbs.

She screamed, not because it was painful, but because she couldn't take the fact that she had just lost both of her hands which effectively meant the end for her life as a hyper-human. She kept on screaming and failed to realize that Cecil was aiming his blade at her neck in air.

Her men, realizing that Kakari was in no condition to look after herself, quickly grabbed her and left the scene at once. Cecil, fortunately for them and Kakari, did not chase them.

First aid was applied to her, but it wasn't much of a help. Bleeding wouldn't stop. Having no other choice, they asked Freedom colony to provide them with medical treatments.

Lila faced them with Niak and Minghua as bodyguards. Kakari was unconscious and was still bleeding from her limbs.

Lila crossed her arms. "Do you seriously expect us to help you after what you have done?" She tried to stay calm, but it was hard for even her.

"No, we are not expecting," One of Kakari's men spoke. "We know what we did."

She sighed and shook her head hopelessly.

"Fine, we will help you. We still stop her bleeding and that's it. You are to leave here at once after that."

Niak and Minghua were surprised to hear Lila's response.

"But, ma'am, they killed ..."

Lila stopped them by raising her arm. "I do know." Her voice was slightly shaking.

"But, ma'am!" Niak persisted. "This is not a good idea!"

"Vengeance will only bring more vengeance. It has to stop somewhere," Lila responded calmly this time. "We and the Nebula pirates are allies for now."

Niak violently walked off, and Minghua was about to follow him. However, Lila cleared her throat which stopped him from going.

"I am sorry," Minghua responded.

"Let me see her limbs," Lila said to Kakari's men.

The men quickly took off bandages that they had applied. As soon as bandages came off, bleeding resumed, but it wasn't bleeding as much as before, perhaps because she had lost much blood so far.

"Clean cut... The cuts are so clean as if her hands were sliced by air," Minghua inspected the wounds and asked. "The Crimson wizard did this?"

The men nodded.

Lila managed to seize the bleeding by using her ESP, and they were immediately forced to leave the colony after.

Olné was shocked to hear the news of the event, but he seemed to have accepted this accident rather calmly. Doctors were placing Kakari in a capsule to restore her health.

"So, no chance to regenerate her lost hands?" Olné asked.

"No," The chief doctor responded. "The DNA info simply isn't there. It must have been the Crimson wizard's doing. Such powers..."

Regeneration was done from extracting information from DNA of a cell. No information of her hands was left in Kakari's DNA as if it was erased.

"Implants then?"

"Yes, that's the only way. We will install military-grade implants, but they won't be good enough for her class."

"That's alright. Just make sure that she recovers."

"That is out of our control, I am afraid."

"What are you saying?"

"She was obviously mentally disturbed when she saw her hands sliced, and I know her personality pretty well. I am quite certain that she is not mentally stable now."

"We must recover. She is to marry -"

"We do know, sir."

Olne crossed his arms. "Then make sure she recovers."

"But that is -"

"Make sure," Olne raised his voice slightly. "She recovers."

The chief doctor was silent for a moment, and he nodded eventually.

However, her recovery was easier to be said than done. She was found to be completely broken mentally after a week of attempts to bring her consciousness back.

Olne was watching Kakari who was literally pulling her hairs off through a mirror window. She was screaming and yelling unrecognizable words as if she had completely lost her mind.

"I will be honest with you," The doctor said. "If we didn't force to bring her back, she might have been fine."

The doctor was directly blaming Olne for the current result.

"Fine," Olne gritted his teeth. "I admit that the fault lies on me. What to do now?"

"There is no way for her to recover within few weeks. It will take perhaps months or even ... years."

Her arranged wedding was supposed to be held in a week.

"No chance to recover in a week, is there."

The doctor shook his head firmly.

"I see."

After a long silence, Olne spoke. "Will she recover at least?"

"Time is the key, sir. Give her time."

Kakari started to swallow her own tongue, and a group of doctors rushed into the confined room and seized her.

Olne sighed. He told himself that he should have never allowed her to take on the mission. It was too late though.

Two seasons (6 months) passed. Slowly, but surely, she started to recover. Olne took advices from the doctor and let her be and take her time. After two seasons, Kakari was able to enter rehabilitation. She learned how to control her new hands and also learned its limits.

At 3rd season, she was almost fully recovered.

Kakari entered Olne's quarter. She was dressed as she did before and she still carried weapons she used to carry nine months ago.

"About your marriage," Olne started to talk as she stood firm. "It is still on. The Dietrich has been very understanding."

"I see."

"You did complete the mission although you were hurt. I thank you for that. The Dietrich gave us time because you completed the mission objective."

Kakari slowly started to frown as the painful memories struck her.

Olne stood up from his chair. "This will be the last time we will talk as a father and a daughter. The next time you talk to me, you will be a Dietrich and I will be a Ra."

Kakari bowed to Olne deeply. "Thank you for everything, father."

"And thank you for doing this." Olne also bowed to her. "You are ... to leave tonight. You are allowed to bring a small group of your own bodyguards and maids, for Mars is a harsh place."

"I see."

"That is all..., farewell."

What a short farewell for a daughter and a father, however, neither of them felt missing anything because they had always been that way. Kakari decided to pack her belongings and headed to her quarter.

Iusen Ra was blocking her. Glaring at her, he told her, "So, you are really going."

Kakari remained calm. "There was no other choice for me," She said. It was perhaps the only excuse she could come up with.

"You do have a choice!"

She twisted her head, confused. Iusen was trying to make a point.

"What choice?"

Iusen violently took Kakari's hand and started to take her somewhere, but she resisted firmly and even took out her blade.

"What are you trying to do?" She demanded.

"Come with me."

"To where?"

"Let's elope."

"Elope?!" She raised her voice. "We are cousins!"

"So, what? It's not like it's not allowed!"

Iusen was speaking truth. Such was allowed, but of course, as long as it was approved by their clan. Inbreeding was one of methods to keep their blood purer, and medical technology was advanced enough to fight back any birth defects from DNA level.

Kakari violently took her hand off. "Get off me, you freak!" And she drew out her weapon. She knew well that how men became monstrous in such times. She didn't have firsthand experience, but she was trained to fight against such situations.

"You are ...," Iusen took few steps back, clearly shocked. "Rejecting me?"

"Reject you?" She sneered. "There is nothing between us! There is nothing to begin with!"

They were arguing loudly in a hallway, and bypassers started to take a notice.

"You can't do this to me! All those years ..."

Iusen's words were cut soon by a voice of authority.

"That is enough, son."

Aizen Ra walked to stand between Kakari and Iusen. He briefly bowed to Kakari.

"I apologize for my son's behavior, m'lady."

Kakari quickly draw away her blade to pay him respect.

Aizen then turned to Iusen.

"I would have no problem if she accepted you. I would have allowed such a relationship. However, you were obviously rejected."

Iusen dropped his head.

"Take the reject like a man," Aizen told him firmly.

Aizen then spoke to rest of crowd who progressively gathered around for the event.

"I would appreciate if you do not spread words about this event." Aizen gently asked of them. "Please, let's keep this just between us."

The Ra was a rather small family, and they respected each other. For so, they agreed with Aizen.

"Yes, sir, we know the deal. No one else know of this event but us," A couple spoke so, and others inclined to agree.

"Thank you." After bowing to the crowd, he ordered Iusen to go to his quarter. Iusen had no choice but to comply.

"Lady, could we talk for a moment?" Aizen asked Kakari formally.

She nodded. "Yes, of course, uncle."

They went to a cafeteria, and the crowd was disbanded.

"What would you like?" A waitress with a rather provoking maid outfit asked them.

"Coffee," Kakari replied.

"Tea," Aizen replied.

A short silence was between them before Aizen initiated talking.

"As for my son, I apologize. He's rather ... hot blooded. I apologize."

"That's alright, but I must say ... I was shocked to hear his words."

Aizen was about to reply, but he was disturbed by the waitress.

"Here are your coffee and tea."

They had spent some time enjoying their drinks. And, while at it, they exchanged no words. After they were done with their drinks, Aizen asked, "So, you are leaving today or tomorrow?"

"Tonight. I am going to pack few things and just go."

"I see. Good luck to you, and honestly that is all I can say. I am sorry. How are your hands?"

Kakari glanced at her hands briefly.

"They are okay. I am used to them now."

Aizen knew well what kind of trouble she went through to become stable after the incident. Therefore, he decided not to make any more comments relating the incident.

Aizen and Kakari had a short conversation, and she was back in her quarter. A small luggage case was all she was given. She could barely put much in there, perhaps few pieces of clothes and few essential items although she really didn't have much to pack. Still, it gave her a bitter feeling of how valuable she was.

She did pack in mere ten minutes and headed to where she was told to go, a fighter bay. She saw a familiar face there.

"Grent?"

Grent was all dressed up in black formal suit. It wasn't only him. There were six more men in the same exact suit.

"Hello, m'lady," Grent bowed to her. "Are you ready?"

"Don't tell me that you are coming?"

"I indeed am. Your father has assigned seven bodyguards and fifteen maids to you. The maids should be here soon."

Speaking of the devil, the so-called maids arrived in embarrassing maid uniforms.

One of them, who looked the fiercest of all, approached Grent.

"We are here. Where is the lady?"

Kakari cleared her throat.

The fierce-looking maid glared at her momentarily and loosened her face.

"Oh," She curtseyed at once. "M'lady."

"Maids? Was this father's idea?"

"I am afraid so," Grent replied, chuckling.

"My name is Iss. We are here to serve you."

Rest of maids curtseyed. They seemed to be well trained.

"Let's be honest," Kakari said. "What is your true profession?"

Iss remained in a curtseyed position and answered. "We are professional assassins, lady."

"Assassins, huh..."

Grent and six bodyguards, Iss and fourteen maids in disguise, were her assets. She started to wonder if she really knew what she was getting herself into.

They were finally on a transport bound to Mars. It was being escorted by about ten fighters. Kakari had been stripped of her right to pilot her fighter craft anymore. She was to be a bride. Killing was no longer a privilege she had.

Grent and his bodyguards, being males, were not allowed to spend time in the same room as Kakari. The maids, however, were allowed to be in the same room as her. Still, Iss was the only one who was by her side. Rest of maids kept a certain distance from Kakari.

There was nothing to do and silence dominated the room. No window was allowed for safety.

"So..., have you been to Mars before?" Kakari asked Iss who was reading what appeared to be an old-fashioned paper book, leaning her back against a cold metal wall.

"A barren place, it is. No green grows on surface," She replied indifferently.

"So, you've been there."

"Yes, we were sent to there once to know what we were getting into about three seasons ago."

Three seasons ago, it was when Kakari had experienced the ... incident.

"What are you reading?"

"A novel from ancient times. I forgot the title."

"Forgot... the title?"

"Yes, I have forgotten."

"What are you reading then?"

"Some historical story, I have forgotten about which."

"So., you just read' em?"

"What else would you do?"

Kakari looked around. There was nothing to be entertained. It was truly a boring place.

"I guess you have a point."

Weeks passed, and Kakari's transport arrived at Mars.

Kakari stood before a console monitor. Newly assigned maids from the syndicate were measuring her size.

"What a barren planet," She mumbled.

There was nothing literally on the planet surface. Where her transport landed, there was a very basic port facility, and that was it. There was no city, no crowd, no nothing.

Kakari stood alone as the door to outside was going down. She chose not to be represented by anyone. It was one of her last requests, so it was honored.

What welcomed Kakari was not people but fierce sandstorm. She could hardly see one foot ahead.

"Welcome to Mars, lady."

However, a voice resounded in the storm.

"We've been expecting you."

Fifteen maids soon stood behind her, and seven bodyguard (or thugs) from a distance. They were the only force she was allowed to be given.

"Who are you anyway? Identify yourself first!"

Shadow figures became clearer as they approached her. There were only three people.

"We are the clan representative. We welcome your ladyship."

"Marcus did not come?"

"He's attending to his duties. You will see him soon..."

"Great, my so-called future husband doesn't even come to hail his new and first wife, just great."

The three representatives ignored Kakari's whining and led her and her guards to a land transport. The transport's destination was an underground facility, a rather large one. Dusts of sand from the transport were immediately sucked away by a vacuum system as it entered its parking bay.

There were heavily armed soldiers in the vicinity as well.

Kakari was given a private quarter. Her bodyguards and maids were given separate rooms as well. However, Iss chose to stay outside of Kakari's room. Kakari did not ask Iss to come in. They both knew their roles and chose not to interfere with each other.

It was two days later that Kakari would meet Marcus under watchful eyes of Marcus' retainers. Kakari had Grent and Iss by her side.

"Welcome to Mars, your ladyship."

Marcus walked down from his throne at a slow pace. "Welcome to Mars." The best way to describe Marcus was a weak man. He was tall but slim guy, a pale man some might say.

Kakari felt like giving Marcus a good slap, but even she knew her situation. She curtsied and replied. "Thank you for your kind welcome."

Iss could sense Kakari's sarcasm in her response.

Perhaps, Marcus sensed as well. Clearing his throat, he spoke, "I apologize that you had to wait two days. I had an urgent matter."

Kakari was dismissed soon after.

"You handled your temper fairly well," Iss said while they were walking to her quarter.

"I felt like slapping him."

Iss shrugged and grinned. "I wouldn't blame you."

"Ladies, please watch what you speak." Grent let out of a cough as a warning.

Kakari sighed. "Well, I am glad that he wasn't an ugly man at least. That's one less factor to worry about."

Their wedding was scheduled to be held a week later, the Dietrich announced. During the week, Kakari was to learn everything about Mars, the clan, and affairs of miners.

It was a busy week, so time flew by quickly. Their wedding ceremony was brief. In fact, it lasted for only five minutes. There weren't any guest except for a few close Dietrich retainers. Iss and Grent were also allowed to be there. The ceremony was held by the eldest retainer whose name was Keislam. He was a six hundred eighty nine year old retainer who had been serving the clan for his entire life.

In the end, Kakari Ra became Kakari Dietrich. She was sent back to her quarter again after the ceremony, and her life as Marcus' wife would begin.

Although they were married, they weren't allowed to see each other casually. They weren't even allowed to sleep together unless approved by retainers.

What was worse, Kakari wasn't accepted into the clan. She was treated as an outsider.

"Ridiculous," Kakari growled in her quarter. "This is ridiculous. Who do they think I am?"

It had been somewhat less than a season ever since she became Marcus' wife. She was allowed to "mate" with Marcus twice so far.

"Isn't Marcus the headman? Why is he letting his retainers control his life like this?"

Iss knocked the door. "Lady, it is Iss."

"Come in."

Iss was no longer wearing a maid uniform. Instead, she was a man's suit. "I've the reports you've asked for."

She had asked Iss to find how the clan was run and why it was so.

"Alright, tell me."

"Apparently, the headman's father passed away early in his life. His retainers took over clan affairs in the headman's name ever since he was young. Even though he is now an adult, the retainers didn't let go of their powers."

"Ugh, another power struggle," Kakari muttered.

"And it seems the headman is weak willed and hasn't been able to take back his rights."

Kakari sighed. She hated the fact that her supposedly husband was a weakling. She knew she couldn't love Marcus, but she wanted to have powers at least. In fact, she hoped to have more political powers than she did back in the Nebula.

Iss knew Kakari's personality and saw through her mind.

"Lady, you know what you must do in order to gain powers."

Kakari narrowed her eyes. She knew what Iss was talking about. It was to conceive a baby and give birth to a son. That would certainly solidify her position.

The Dietrich blood line was declining. Marcus and only handful others were left as insiders. Marcus, while still young, didn't seem to be a leader material which was one of major contributing factors for retainers taking control of the clan.

"Yes, I do know...", She replied vacantly.

And so, her new life began. Years passed, Kakari was forced to endure harsh treatments from the clan members. It took her four years to finally, at last, conceive a child. However, until the baby in her womb was verified to be a son, she still received not so friendly treatments.

"About damn fucking time..."

Kakari was celebrating the announcement that the baby in her womb was a male. Iss and Grent were there in her quarter.

"Indeed, m'lady," Grent had light tears in his eyes. "You've endured for so long. This is your reward."

It wasn't just Kakari who benefited from this. Marcus was benefiting from her pregnancy as well. He was attempting to regain powers over the clan. Kakari had been literally brainwashing him whenever they slept together. She kept on reminding him that he was the headman and he had rights to command over the clan.

Eventually, Marcus himself started to believe Kakari as well because she was the only person who spoke freely to him.

However, it didn't bring completely positive effects. Marcus trying to regain the control over the clan started to cause conflicts between the Dietrich insiders and retainers.

Retainers insisted that Marcus was not fit yet and they should continue to hold the powers over the clan, and Marcus insisted otherwise. The conflict became bolder as days went on. By time Kakari's belly had become large, the clan was divided.

Roughly half of the clan supported Marcus. And the other half centralized their forced around a single retainer whose name was Xaias. Xaias was a senior retainer but he was actually not one of retainers who insisted on holding powers away from Marcus.

What made Xaias rose in powers was his sizable wealth and personal forces he possessed. And, of course, he didn't support Marcus. He wasn't originally one of retainers who resisted giving powers back to Marcus however. He simply found Marcus unfit as a leader. Additionally, he found Marcus' wife, Kakari, to be too ruthless and wicked.

As the Dietrich clan became divided, miners became divided as well. For miners, Xaias was far more popular as he had been overseeing mining operations for hundreds of years.

Marcus had never been to a mine. For miners, Marcus was just a puppet leader whom they had never met. Still, Marcus had more valid claims for wanting to control the clan, for he was the sole heir to the clan.

At last, Kakari gave birth to a son. The child was named Maquae. Some believed that, with the birth of Marcus' heir, the conflicts would die off, but the conflicts became only bolder.

Xaias insisted to hold the control of the clan until Maquae's adulthood. In other words, retainers of the Dietrich were firm on a belief that Marcus was never going to be fit for their leader.

The time was year 8630.

Grent and Iss were discussing options with Kakari. Marcus wasn't present because Kakari couldn't count on him.

"Lady, you have given birth to a legitimate heir. And yet they still resist us," Grent growled in disgust. "Those bastards!"

Iss was calm and quiet. That was apparently her character. She was a cold blooded killer.

"I hate to admit this, but they do have a valid concern. Even I can see that Marcus is unfit," Kakari said, "If I were one of the retainers, I would be standing against Marcus."

"True, lady," Iss spoke. "But you are here. They could submit to you instead of your husband."

"Yes!" Grent nodded in agreement strongly. "You've given birth to an heir. You are now fully a member of the clan now."

"They are looking for every excuse to attack us. I doubt they will bow to me unless I use force," Kakari replied. She lowered her voice just in case. "How many can you gather?" She whispered.

"About two hundreds," Iss replied right away.

Kakari gave Grent and Iss a nod. She was going to ambush Xaias. In addition, a good chance came fairly easily as Xaias was often out in mines as an overseer.

On this particular day, Xaias was overseeing a mining operation. He was with only two bodyguards, and there were only handful miners setting up equipment to initiate scanning and probing.

The fundamental method of mining had changed as technology was developed. Miners would set up machines and let them do the hard work. However, that is not to say that a miner's skill didn't matter. The mining machines required vast knowledge in geology as well as metallurgy.

As the miners were working in an artificial cave, it was a perfect place for an ambush since there wasn't really any place to flee.

Kakari, Grent, Iss, and their two hundred armed men were silently approaching the cave where Xaias was supposed to be overseeing a mining operation. A scout confirmed that Xaias was indeed overseeing an operation.

She signaled her men to conceal themselves as they approached the cave. The miners were setting up machines, and machine noises muffled all other exterritorial sound.

It was a man-made cave with only one exit. It was the perfect place to ambush. She did order an ambush on Xaias soon after confirming his presence and making sure that the area was secure. Xaias had only twenty men and they were miners. The situation was clearly in Kakari's favor. Grent and Iss pushed Xaias's men in a corner.

As Kakari was about to order final assault, the whole area started to shake violently.

"What the?!"

One of Xaias's miners shouted, "The cave is unstable!"

Everyone lost their balance, and the ceiling started to crumble.

"M'lady, we have to get out of here!" Grent spoke to her as he grabbed her hand. "M'lady!"

Small rocks started to rain the cave, and the ceiling was clearly coming down.

However, Kakari wanted to finish Xaias. She insisted to go on even if she had to crawl to reach Xaias, but she was soon stopped by Iss also.

"No, lady, we have to escape from here," Iss demanded.

Kakari gritted her teeth as she was forced to withdraw from the scene. She hoped that Xaias and his men would be buried alive, but her hope proved to be false as Xaias dug himself out with their equipment.

Xaias soon announced what had happened to him and publically accused Kakari for the crime. He had plenty of indisputable evidences.

Kakari's plan of ambush backfired literally. Xaias and other retainers demanded strongly Marcus to step down. And over half of miners agreed with their view. With so many asking Marcus to step down, there seemed to be no other choice. The tension was too high and was about to be erupted into a violence if there wasn't a resolution to the matter soon.

Kakari called Iss on a night.

"What a nightmare. The plan backfired," Kakari said.

"I apologize that I was unable to finish Xaias off."

"I was the one who came up with the plan. I am the one to blame."

They were silent for a moment.

"Still," Kakari broke the silence. "This needs to be resolved," She added, "Somehow."

Iss was silent. She had no good idea.

Kakari inhaled deeply. Closing her eyes, she looked troubled. "I do have a plan," She said, "But this is too ... big."

"You did not call Grent. You called only me. I assume this has something to do with assassination?"

"Yes, I had a thought, a daring idea."

What Iss was about to hear was something even she, a cold blooded assassin, could not think of.

"I need to poison Maquae and let him die," Kakari declared.

Iss was shocked to hear what Kakari had to say. Still, she calculated possible outcomes.

"You are going to put the blame on Xaias," Iss answered after a moment of silence and deep thoughts.

Kakari gave her a nod.

Iss was speechless. She knew that Kakari was ruthless, but she had no idea that she'd go this far. However, Iss had to admit that her cruel plan was brilliant. For once, Iss was absolutely certain that Kakari's plan would work out.

"Ma'am, still we are talking about killing off the only heir of the clan."

"I can conceive another child. Children can be conceived as long as there are a willing fertile male and a willing fertile female, but once I lose the control of the clan, it cannot be restored."

Ordinary people would put their children on higher priority. However, for Kakari, she had come to Mars for an arranged marriage. There was no love between Marcus and Kakari. Perhaps, Marcus had feelings for her, but Kakari certainly did not. Since there was no love in her marriage, she required something else as a compromise. It was the basics of Give & Take. She required powers, political powers. And for the powers she required, Marcus had to be the clan leader of the Dietrich no matter what the cost.

Grent knew this. Iss knew this also. Still, having come up with such an idea to kill off her own child was beyond ruthlessness. It was insanity.

"Do it. It has to be done," Kakari said to Iss who was having an obviously hard time to swallow the concept. But she was an assassin, and her task was to protect Kakari.

"Very well, ma'am. If that is your wish, I shall carry on."

Iss was a professional, and therefore, the job was exceptionally carried out. Maquae was poisoned by engine oil commonly found on Mars. Harmful oil was found in his formula.

Attempts were made to cure by Marcus' doctors, but Maquae experienced organ failures and eventually died in two days. His death came as a shock for everyone, even including Xaias because he was immediately targeted as the primary suspect.

Xaias, of course, denied the suspicion strongly, but not many believed him. Rightfully so, Marcus was furious and summoned Xaias who refused being summoned unless he was allowed to bring bodyguards. That added more suspicion unintentionally.

He was eventually summoned in front of Marcus, Kakari, and other retainers in a court hall. There were hundreds of miners as well. He was accompanied by six body guards who were fully armed. Apparently, Xaias had no intention of turning himself in.

Marcus could care less whatever Xaias was thinking however. He was for the first time in his life utterly furious.

"Xaias!" Marcus bellowed; He was clearly angered. Kakari was sitting next to him. Marcus and Kakari were in their thrones. "How dare you! How could you!" Tears were filling his eyes.

"You've gone too far," Kakari added. "You thought victory was within your grasp and were so blinded by your own agenda that you murdered my son!"

At this point, tears dropped through Marcus' cheeks. Miners saw him. Everybody saw him.

"I did not murder the heir!" Xaias responded back fiercely. "Why would I murder the heir?!"

"Who else is there?!" Marcus shouted back. "WHO ELSE IS THERE!!!" He attempted to run toward Xaias but he was stopped by Kakari. "Let me go! He killed my child! He killed my son!" Crying out loud, he still tried to reach Xaias. The scene made miners to truly believe that Xaias was the killer.

Being placed back in his throne by Kakari, Marcus covered his eyes with one hand and continued to sob. Turning toward Xaias who remained speechless over Marcus' reaction, she spoke to him.

"Even if it was not you, you must take responsibility for what has been done," Kakari explained, "One of your men could have done it. What seems to be clear is that someone who opposed the Dietrich bloodline has done this."

Xaias frowned. He knew where it was going. "I am flamed!" He shouted and looked around. "I am framed!" He circled around, asking silently for their support. However, people in the hall avoided eye contacts with Xaias.

Kakari stood up violently from her throne and pointed fiercely at Xaias.

"You take responsibility for what your men have done!" She added, "Just as you've demanded my husband to step down for my actions!"

For once, everyone in the hall agreed with Kakari.

"Give me time!" Xaias demanded. No, he got on his knees and begged. "Give me time to solve this!"

"Give you time?! So that you could get away with this?!" Marcus responded aggressively.

"Iss, Grent!" Kakari shouted out. "Finish him!"

Grent and Iss revealed themselves from behind of Kakari's throne. They quickly dashed toward Xaias who his bodyguards pushed him backwards to save him.

Grent knocked down two guards on front, and Iss approached Xaias.

"Find peace," She whispered to him as she thrust a sharp dagger deeply into his throat. She drew out another dagger and shoved it into his left chest, his heart. Xaias choked as he fell backwards. He couldn't even let out a scream.

The event changed the whole conflict upside down. The retainers lost their ground almost entirely and Marcus was able to cut them off from their political powers. The Dietrich's regime became firm. It was a bitter victory for Kakari though, for she had to sacrifice her own child.

As decades passed, Marcus' regime was firm, but an issue started to emerge slowly. Kakari was unable to conceive a second child. She was fertile, but Marcus was not so.

The time was 8911.

Marcus and Kakari had held absolute powers in the Dietrich clan for nearly three hundred years. However, she still hadn't been able to conceive a second child, and Marcus was believed to have become infertile. Furthermore, his health started to decline. Such a situation caused unrest within the clan. Retainers started talking about their next clan leader, and Kakari was never their choice.

At one night, Iss visited Kakari in her quarter.

"Ma'am, this is Iss."

She had apparently brought a dangerous rumor that some retainers wanted to eliminate the Dietrich bloodline. All they had to do was wait until Marcus's passing, and they'd take over the clan.

"Well, if I were them, I'd think the same as them," Kakari said, sighing.

"Ma'am, it is not too late. You do not have to insist on neutral fertilization."

Kakari shook her head. "That's no use. The clan code is to have neutral fertilization."

"Why don't you do this in secret then? To be honest, I don't get why you are insisting to play by rules, ma'am."

"I wouldn't," She replied, "But Marcus wouldn't break the rule."

"Getting his sperm would be no problem for you."

Iss was right. Kakari could attempt artificial fertilization if she really wanted. Perhaps, a part of her wanted her child to be conceived neutrally. Nevertheless, her choices and time were running out.

Year 8913, Iss visited Kakari well past midnight. She was currently in bed with Marcus who was ill.

"Ma'am, I apologize for this intervention, but I've brought agent news."

A moment later, Kakari opened door. "What is it?" She was in her nightgown which was see-through.

Iss whispered to her, "Grent passed away."

Kakari froze momentarily. Then confused, she asked, "What?"

Grent died in his bed. His age was 621. He lived a full life. Kakari was greatly disturbed by his passing. His death reminded her that time passed, perhaps too many years were wasted.

Iss and Kakari were back in Kakari's quarter.

"Are you sure that this was not an assassination attempt?"

Iss shook her head. "No, ma'am. I did not find any traces, and he had a grin on his face. I suppose he died peacefully."

Kakari sighed deeply. "How many years have passed since I came here?"

"You've been on Mars for about two hundred eighty six years. It will soon be eighty seven years."

Kakari was disgusted by the fact that it had been that many years. At the same time, she was disturbed that she may never be able to leave Mars.

286 years was a long time. It was long enough that the only original servant left for Kakari was Iss, now that Grent passed away. The guards and maids that she had brought moved on with their lives. Some got married, some left Mars, and some died of natural causes.

"How old are you, Iss?"

"I am two years older than you, m'lady."

Kakari was 369 years old.

"... Will I ever be able to get out of this hellhole?"

Iss took her time to make a reply. "That'd depend on your decision, m'lady," She said.

If Marcus died, Kakari would no longer be bound on Mars. As a widow of a clan leader, she'd be allowed to leave. It was only a matter of time before Marcus would pass away. That was the easy part. She came to Mars to generate an heir whose roots would be the Dietrich and the Ra. It was important for her to conceive an heir and place the heir in total control of the Dietrich clan. It'd make easier for 3Ra Syndicate to arrange deals with the Dietrich in the future.

She had never failed a mission. She had never.

"Fine, I will obtain his sperm. Be ready."

Iss gave her a nod.

Marcus' sperm had extremely low mortality. It took Kakari years to obtain a suitable dose of healthy sperms.

"His sperm mortality is so low. It's amazing how you conceived Maquae," Iss remarked as she looked at a dose of Marcus' sperms extracted from Kakari's vagina. "I suppose, when he was healthy, it was better, but still..."

"Any solutions?"

"Any of these sperms could be used to create an embryo, but I wouldn't be certain for a good result. A healthy sperm is necessary for a good embryo unless you wish to risk for birth defects."

Medical technology was advanced enough to counter birth defects, but that wasn't the issue. A mother wanted a healthy child to begin with, and Kakari had the same thought.

Kakari agreed with Iss and decided to try numerous times until she could find a healthy sperm, which turned out to be so much harder than it sounded.

Marcus' health decline was noticeably becoming rapid. His doctors attempted to cure him, but eventually they voiced that his neutral life span was nearly at its end. Seeing that there was no heir, Marcus was talked into artificial fertilization. However, the talk was met with a strong opposition from the retainers.

And it was around that time and Kakari could finally find a healthy sperm.

It was as usual. Kakari came back to see Iss after having an intercourse with Marcus. She had her vagina coated with a special coating not to harm sperms and she had her Cervix blocked. In other words, she was doing everything in her ability to conceive a child as naturally as possible.

"I found the sperm!" Iss raised her voice. It was the first time that she had ever risen her voice ever as far as Kakari knew.

Iss redirect a live image to a nearby monitor in the lab. Among many dead or near-dead sperms, there was this one sperm that was violently swimming. It was hyperactive and was destroying other sperms nearby.

"That one is surely very active," Kakari remarked.

"This is it, ma'am. We can finally create a healthy embryo."

Kakari nodded slowly and said, "Yes, do that and freeze the embryo."

She planned to keep the embryo for herself. After all these years, she had gotten sick of Mars and everything about it. She wanted to just leave but not alone. She planned to leave with a child.

"You don't plan to make an heir?" Iss asked rightfully so.

"No, I do not. Do you have a problem with it?"

Kakari was willing to kill Iss if she had to.

"No, ma'am. I am just making sure."

"I am glad you are still on my side, Iss."

On year 8997, Marcus was on his death bed. His doctors were amazed that he lasted this long. For all they knew, Marcus had been on death bed for so many decades.

His spirit wanted to stay alive, but his body was giving up.

Kakari was by his side because she had to, not because she loved him.

No one else was in his room. His face was pale. His skinny skeleton figure was indirectly stating that he had been fighting with everything he had. He had held on so far remarkably.

"Kakari...," Marcus said weakly, "How many years have we been together?"

She felt no sympathy for him and responded rather indifferently. "About four hundred years."

Marcus beamed a smile at ceiling, refusing to look at her face, perhaps knowing that she would not smile back. "I know you never loved me. I've known since the beginning. It was an arranged marriage after all."

She figured as much. Marcus was no fool.

"But still..." He continued. Marcus held Kakari's hand tight. "We spent four hundred years together."

"Yes, Marcus."

Also for the first time, she called him by his name; it wasn't out of any kind of affection. It was granting a dying man's wish. Marcus passed away on that night silently in his sleep.

His death placed an end to relatively peaceful time in the clan. Marcus was the last surviving member of the Dietrich bloodline, and with him dead, the clan no longer had any insiders. Kakari could have been considered one, but retainers voiced that she was not a suitable person to take over the clan and the bloodline.

Kakari simply wanted to leave the planet behind and go back to the Nebula. However, she had a mission to do. While she chose to take the embryo with her, she still had to make sure that the clan would have a good standing with the Ra.

It would be her last task on Mars. After this, she would be able to return. She had longed to return for so many years. However, everyone was against her. She had a small support from few miners and that was all she had. It wasn't going to be easy, and for next decade, she would fight a losing war.

By 9012, Kakari had been battling retainers for a decade to rightfully claim to be the headman of the clan. She lacked support from retainers, but she had support from some loyal miners. It seemed like a losing battle, but she insisted to go on.

"I hate this planet. I hate how things work here," Kakari remarked as she was literally pouring liquor into her mouth in her quarter. As usual, Iss was present as well.

"That may change however," Iss said, "A new retainer will be joining soon, they say."

"A new retainer? Who is it?"

Iss shut her mouth as if she was afraid to speak further.

Sensing her obvious hesitation, Kakari asked again. "What is it?"

"You may not remember his name. The new retainer is Masu."

Indeed, Kakari could not recall the name immediately. It took a while for her to realize it.

"Masu...? You mean the guy I ..."

Iss nodded in response.

Kakari assassinated Masu's wife on Freedom colony hundreds years ago.

"This keeps getting just worse and worse, doesn't it?"

What is "name"? The Dietrich, The Ra, The Bau, The O'ren, what does "name" mean? Why does it have to do with one's fate? Why does it decide one's fate? Why?

"Hmph," Kakari sneered. "Now I see why they removed last names for most people..." Kakari remarked as she continued to drown herself in liquor.

Masu was originally banned from entering Mars due to his actions in the past, but that was hundreds years ago, and he was eventually pardoned by Marcus. Marcus knew that his time was running out and was also aware of that none of his retainers was on his side. The only person he could reach out and actually gain support was Masu, his childhood friend as well as a servant. He signed a pardon paper long before he'd pass away.

Rebellious retainers carried on the pardon without any objections as if they were granting the dead man's last wish. The retainers agreed to pardon Masu. They

didn't see him as a threat. Masu's return was done in secret. He was welcomed by no one.

Masu was well aware of who Kakari was. She assassinated his wife, Affie, but he held no grudge, for he did not come back to Mars to extract revenge. He came back to Mars to assist the clan. At this point, he wasn't aware that Marcus had passed away already.

Masu was introduced to Kakari on the same day.

"Greetings," Masu said as he bowed to her.

Kakari's face quivered slightly. He looked completely different from how he saw him last time. His aura and his appearance were all different.

"Welcome back to Mars, retainer Masu," She replied indifferently.

Marcus was unaware that Kakari was the one who assassinated Masu's wife. 3Ra Syndicate did not report who the assassin was. They did report that Kakari was hurt severely during the mission however.

"Where is Marcus?" Masu asked innocently.

He was taken to Marcus' grave. He was astonished to hear that Marcus had passed away over a decade ago. He stood in front of Marcus' grave for hours, saying nothing, doing nothing.

It was well past midnight. Kakari was drowning herself in liquor. Lately, she had been drinking often to relive her from all the stress. As usual, Iss was in her quarter as well.

"He is an interesting man," Iss commented. "It's hard to believe that he was the same man hundreds years ago when you killed his wife."

"This gets just worse and worse, doesn't it? Now we have one more retainer who will stand against me."

Much to Kakari's surprise, Masu did not stand against her. In fact, he supported Kakari's cause and attempted to reason with rebellious retainers that what they were doing was purely out of the desire for powers.

Eventually though, an internal war occurred. The rebellious retainers called in for outside assistance. Shockingly enough, they asked the Bau to assist them. This action caused severe uproar from local miners. In fact, as soon as the news reached Mars, majority of local miners changed side and started to support Kakari.

The Bau was the reason the Dietrich had to flee to Mars in the first place. Asking the Bau for assistance was as if asking to have their own clan destroyed. It was seen as an act of treason.

Tens of thousands of Bau forces flew onto Mars. They were equipped better and trained better as fighters.

"It is too late now," Masu said, "The Bau has the means of wiping out this clan."

Kakari, Iss, and Masu were gathered to discuss further actions.

"I cannot believe this. I would never ask the fucking Bau to assist, and they did it just like that," Kakari remarked while growling.

Kakari's forces were consisted of militia and the number did not exceed one thousand. It was already a lost war.

"M'lady, may I suggest that you escape from this planet?"

Kakari glared at her. "Iss, I bloody hope you do not mean that sincerely."

“I do mean so. You’ve done enough. Four hundred years, you’ve done enough, lady. Let us go back to where we long, to the Nebula.”

The Nebula...

It had been so long that Kakari had forgotten what it was like to be in the Nebula.

“In fact, I’ve arranged escorts for your return, lady. Your father awaits you, ma’am.”

Kakari hesitated. What Iss meant was that she was allowed to come back home. Her task was over whether it was failed or not. At this point, she no longer cared about the mission.

“Lady Ra, if you stay here, you will be captured. I agree with Iss. You must leave,” Masu attempted to convince her.

“Retainer Masu,” Iss said, “I would like you to come with us.”

Kakari startled to hear that. “What are you saying, Iss?!”

“My place is here.” Masu beamed a tranquil grin. “If the clan goes down, I will go down with it.”

They had to act fast; there was no time to waste. Iss had everything prepared in advance. Kakari and Iss reached an escape shuttle. Masu was also accompanying them.

"Take the shuttle and leave here," Masu said while Iss entered a passcode for the shuttle. "Then you will be out of here for good."

Kakari and Iss exchanged a silent nod at each other.

"Why are you helping us?" Iss demanded. "Especially when the lady has murdered your late wife?"

Masu froze momentarily as he looked up at Kakari who was behind Iss and was at the shuttle entrance. He recalled how much hatred, how much regrets, and how much pains he had experienced. It was painful for himself and those around him. For a time, Masu aimed to exact revenge.

In the end, however, all he did was beam a smile at Kakari and told her, "It's all in the past. One has to get over it at one point."

Ever since Kakari had arrived on Mars, her objective was to get back home. She hated the planet. She hated her late husband, and she hated the politics. She went on only because she had to. Now, it was almost over. Once she stepped in the shuttle, it'd be all over.

"Iss," She called out. "Give him the capsule."

The capsule meant the embryo.

Iss showed no objection and pulled out a thumb-size capsule. She approached Masu and handed it over.

"What is this?" Masu wondered.

"It is a fertilized embryo, the lady's egg and the late headman's sperm. It is currently inactive," Iss explained.

"His name is Kan, Kan Dietrich," Kakari added. "Take a good care of my son, retainer Masu."

"The bloodline is not over...?"

"It is not. I planned to take him with me to the Nebula, but I realize that I should not," Kakari replied.

She turned around and was about to enter the shuttle.

"M'lady," Iss called out. "Please heed my plea."

Kakari turned back again. "Go on."

“I’d like to remain here on Mars.”

She narrowed her eyes. “Why?”

“Your son will need protectors. While I feel that we could trust retainer Masu here, he will stand alone against many. Besides, your son will need a trainer who can teach him about us, the Ra.”

Kakari closed her eyes for a moment. For a moment, she thought she should also stay on Mars and finish what had been begun.

Reading her thought, Masu told her, “You should leave, lady Ra. Your presence can only stir up more resistances.”

After a moment of silence, Kakari opened her eyes and looked at Iss vigilantly.

“Iss!” She called out.

“Yes, m’lady.”

“I hereby declare that you’ve been released from the oath you’ve sworn. You did not break your oath, rather you’ve fulfilled your duty admirably and I am releasing you from your duties. I am retiring you, Iss.”

She bowed toward Kakari sincerely. “Thank you.”

“Retainer Masu, take damn good care of my son.”

“I will do what I can to insure that the bloodline is not lost.”

As her shuttle exited Mars’ atmosphere, she sat back deeply and took a view on the planet. She said not a word as she piloted the shuttle slowly away from the planet. She was soon hailed by a group of seemingly pirates.

"Welcome back, ma'am, but I am scanning only one life signature aboard. Where is Iss?"

Without hesitation, she responded firmly. "She is dead. I am the only survivor."

"I see. I am sorry to hear that. Please let us escort you."

"Have your way," She replied.

Kakari had finally returned home after four hundred years. 3Ra syndicate station was much bigger when she returned.

Her father, Olne Ra, and other Ra family members welcomed her return in docking bay. The Ra family became bigger apparently as she was unable to recognize most of supposedly Ra members.

"Welcome home," Olne hugged Kakari warmly. "It has been so long." He grew old.

For some odd reasons, Kakari didn't feel home. It felt ... alien. Furthermore, the Nebula was no longer singing in her ears. The singing had become only noise. She felt like a total stranger at home.

Olne explained that there had been fourteen new Ra family members since she was gone.

"All thanks to your efforts, importing needed materials was breeze. You've done a good job, Kakari," He added.

She was given the same quarter she had when she left the station. Apparently, Olne kept her former quarter vacant all these years.

She stood alone in her quarter. Nothing changed in the room. Every furniture and object was the same as four hundred years ago.

Nothing's changed here.

Tears ran through her cheeks. She didn't know why.

- Fin -

