

## 172 – Soul Scar

Armen was grumbling as he attempted to heal my damaged eye for the fourth time since we’d left Redmoss Enclave.

“**I waited too long to heal it,**” he kept muttering, sounding disappointed in himself.

We were only a few minutes out from Evergreen and though I put up a brave front, I was beginning to seriously regret having borrowed Saoirse’s Truesight. The sclera of my eye had turned completely-red, as though I’d taken a nasty punch and ruptured every blood vessel within. Additionally, the iris had lost all colour and was just milky-white, with the pupil unresponsive to light changes.

The eye as a whole had become overly sensitive to light, and I’d also lost the ability to focus with it, giving me a weird double vision. Instead of covering it with an eyepatch or keeping it closed, I used it to maintain a connection to Karasumany’s vision, which alleviated the pain somehow. The Observer hadn’t left my shoulder since the Enclave.

Still, even though I was borrowing its vision to make up for my own, strange flashes of symbols and unreadable text kept overlaying it, as though the Truesight had left afterimages buried within my eye.

“It’s not your fault, Armen,” I said. “I made a reckless choice and I have to live with the consequences.”

He grumbled some more, before saying, “**Perhaps you can utilise your Reforge Spirit to cure it somehow? I am at a loss with my powers...**”

“Perhaps,” I replied vaguely. I didn’t tell him that I’d already discovered that I couldn’t use the ability on myself.

As we rolled into Main Gate, we had to go through the checkpoint procedure again. I’d just pulled out my Guild Card to show to one of the Witch Hunters that performed the inspection, when Mortl came out and vouchsafed for us all by showing a scroll of free passage signed by the King himself.

Instead of going back inside the dimensional carriage, I ended up sitting at the front with Saoirse who was pretending to be the driver. The card was still in my hand and as I looked down at it, I noticed a new addition:

<i>‘TEMARU RYUUTA’</i>			
<b>ROLE:</b> <i>Exorcist</i>		<b>RANK:</b> <i>Eminent</i>	
<b>GENDER:</b> <i>Male</i>		<b>AGE:</b> <i>18</i>	
<b>ACUMEN:</b> <i>B</i>	<b>DEXTERITY:</b> <i>E</i>	<b>INTELLIGENCE:</b> <i>B</i>	<b>LUCK:</b> <i>F</i>
<b>PACT:</b> <i>A</i>	<b>SOUL:</b> <i>S</i>	<b>STRENGTH:</b> <i>E</i>	<b>VITALITY:</b> <i>F</i>
<b>ABILITIES</b> <i>‘Omniglot’</i> <i>‘Exorcist III’</i> <i>‘Curse of the Excruciating Bond’</i> <i>‘Siren’s Kiss’</i> <i>‘Soul Scar’</i> <i>‘Gravelight Ring Wielder’</i> <i>‘Death’s Hand Wielder’</i> <i>‘Soul-Pact (Mythic Companion)’</i> <i>‘Pact (????)’</i> <i>‘Pact (Observer)’</i> <i>‘Pact (Lifeward)’</i> <i>‘Pact (Greater Knight)’</i> <i>‘Pact (Caster)’</i>			

“Soul Scar...” I muttered, knowing it referred to my eye.

“There are some powers not for a mortal to possess,” Saoirse remarked as we began rolling through the large gate. “It seems a small price to pay for what you pulled off.”

“Really?”

“You might not have noticed this, but when you turned the Demonologist’s familiar into nothingness, you rewrote the fate of many people in the Enclave. Their promised deaths were counted in moments and through your act extended by years.”

“Thank you, that *does* make me feel better. Though I guess this is a scar that won’t ever heal.”

“Do the women of Mondus not find attraction in scars?”

“Not one of this kind, I’m pretty sure.”

“Peculiar. This is a far more impressive scar to have collected than one showing your lack of martial prowess.”

I lifted my black right hand. “Maybe this counts?”

“That is not a scar.”

“You’re not upset that I borrowed your power?” I then asked, changing to a topic I’d been dreading to bring up. Saoirse seemed quite proud of her tremendous power, so for a mortal like me to steal it for personal gain was surely a violation she wouldn’t take lightly.

“We are bonded of soul,” she reminded me and I felt heat creep into my face as she said it. “You may use me as you see fit, for I have already done the same. Though I will admit you surprised me by borrowing one of the powers you were least capable of handling.”

“So I could borrow your power over Death?” I wondered.

“No. I have sealed that away. You would not be able to find it.” It sounded like a challenge more than a warning, though, in truth, I had no idea what I’d even use such tremendous power for. Not to mention, I was fairly sure I needed a True Name to pull it off.

“What about your power of creation?”

“If you can handle it, you are welcome to try,” she said with a sly grin.

It felt like she was definitely testing me, but, at the same time, it was also a sign of our bond growing closer I felt.

Our carriage rolled all the way through to Sanctum Island and then to Founding, as Mortl insisted we bring the reanimated corpse of Carmine Anabello straight to King Egil himself. However, she was the only one to enter the enormous castle, along with the corpse puppet she’d made, while the rest of us waited by the threshold to the district.

From where I sat at the front of the carriage, I saw Prince Hother seated on a cushioned high-backed chair with a Priest attendant close by, while his sister, Princess Freja, was sparring with three Vanguard.

Freja’s steel-scale-covered dress moved with a life of its own, while she was manipulating six slender thrusting swords that orbited around her. Her control was so precise that all three of the Otherworlders were doing their best just to defend themselves, and it didn’t even seem like she was trying *that* hard, as she kept stealing glances in our direction.

From what I could tell, the rule to their sparring session was ‘first blood’. To wrap up the fight that clearly bored her, she warped the shape of the swords so that they curved around her opponents’ guards and barely nicked their skin to draw blood. Within the same breath, all three of the Vanguard had been defeated.

As soon as the fight was over, the Priest attendant moved forward and healed the small cuts that the Otherworlders had received.

I thought that the Princess would walk over to where we were, but instead she had a servant summon three more King’s men, and when they arrived a few moments later, they were a Ranger, a Spellhand, and a Paladin. The three new people gathered with the Vanguard and quickly talked strategy, while Freja was looking directly at me to make sure I was watching.

“It is a good thing the Demon did not get a hold of her,” Saoirse commented, speaking my exact thoughts out loud.

“Indeed,” I replied, unable to look away.

When the six Otherworlders had indicated that they were ready, Freja looked away from us and immediately went on the offensive. In just her opening attack, her six blades deflected four attacks and eliminated the Spellhand and a Vanguard. She moved with such explosive speed and flexibility that I felt certain her dress was aiding her movements.

I’d never considered that someone could use their own Affinity to manipulate the armour they were wearing, but it was clearly a powerful technique, as she used just her enhanced movements to avoid several slashes and strikes.

While four of her blades were keeping the Paladin and two Vanguard busy, she caught an arrow from the Ranger mid-air and sent it back into his foot, obviously avoiding serious injury. She then took her two free blades and launched them at the Paladin like missiles, narrowly cutting him across the back of his right hand, though his overall defence was solid I thought. The remaining Vanguard were taken down a second later.

“Would you like to know the date of her promised death?” Saoirse asked me.

“It’s probably better that I don’t know,” I replied.

When Mortl finally returned, alone, our carriage left Founding and Sanctum Island, arriving towards evening in front of Renji’s place. Ludwig and Mortl said their goodbyes and headed back to the Guild District on foot, while the rest of us went up to the apartment.

Elye walked through the unlocked door as if she owned the place, and the rest of us filed in behind her. Emily was leaning against a cabinet and watching Renji make dinner, but after the Elfin surprised her with a hug that made her squeal, the Spellfist decided that we should all go out somewhere for dinner together.

We spent the rest of the evening in a tavern that made delicious chicken roasts. It also had some amazingly-soft bread to go with an herby butter that Armen consumed as though calories didn't affect him, which they likely didn't...

I told them about all that happened and though Renji was glad that it was over, he seemed disappointed that he hadn't been a part of it.

During our brief absence, they had both been using the Adventurers' Guild courtyard for practicing magic under the supervision of Kally, but she'd had to leave earlier in the day to join her Party on an emergency Bounty Quest.

After our dinner, when we were walking back to the apartment, Emily was so unsteady on her feet from drinking watered-down beer that Renji had to carry her. Elye, not wanting to be left out, was sitting atop Armen's shoulders, both hands gripping his helmet and urging him to go faster. The sight brought me a lot of relief.

“By the way,” Renji said, readjusting his grip on Emily's legs. “We found one of the people responsible for the murders in Serenity forest.”

“Renji punched him in the nose!” Emily exclaimed excitedly.

He cleared his throat, looking a bit embarrassed. “I got maybe a bit too worked-up about it. But I didn't kill him, I swear!”

“So there was more than one person responsible?” I asked.

“Definitely seems that way,” he said with a nod.

“I thought the case had been cold for ages, how'd you find a suspect *that* quickly?”

“I was bait!” Emily said proudly. Her whole face was red and her inhibitions seemed entirely gone.

I halted mid-step. “Renji, please tell me you didn't do what I think you did...”

“It wasn't my idea!” he protested.

“Doesn't matter. That's *too* reckless.” I shook my head in disbelief.

“**I am not sure such a comment is wise for you to use,**” Armen remarked.

After we got back to the apartment and Emily was placed in a bed to sleep off her inebriation, with Elye hopping into the same bed with her, Saoirse, Armen, Renji, and I sat down on the couch in the living room.

I looked my friend in the eyes and said, “I need your help with Kumi. I think I can save her, but I can't do it by myself.”

“What do you need?” he replied.