

“There was truly no other way, was there?” he coughs, a trail of blood slipping down his chin.

“Shut up!” you beg, “for a minute, shut up!” You need to focus. Need to focus and figure out how to save him.

“I am still your superior ... am I not?”

You smirk, glancing down at his face but forcing yourself to look away. It hurt to see him like this. The life trickling out of his beautiful eyes and his skin turning a pale shade as blood lays across his skin. You bite your lip, the pain not registering until you draw blood, the taste bringing you back to your senses. You shake your head, refusing to let the tears fall, to show those emotions.

“What have I said,” he asks harshly, his quivering hand cradling your cheek as he runs his thumb on the area right below your eye. “Tears are not weak.”

“Don’t leave me,” you blurt, choking on the sob that has been fighting to free itself. Your throat feels like it's in pain as you release your pent up emotions. Your walls were moving in and you didn't know what else to do, where to go, or who to turn to.

“I don’t think I have a choice,” he whispers, no longer strong enough to support his hand and it falls. “Do one last thing for me.”

“No,” you start but he shushes you softly, those purple eyes glimmering as a small smile appears. You watch as they switch from one of pain to one of bittersweet joy, his smile trembling as his mind goes to something much farther away.

“I want you to start a new page in your little book of trivialities.” Your eyes squeeze shut but you are unable to keep in the light chuckle.

“For all your wisdom, you still can’t call it what it is. A sketchbook, my love.”

He snorts in a playful manner more so befitting a young child than a dying man, “start that new page you’ve been thinking about. Close your eyes and imagine the view from atop the trees. The waterfalls and the rivers, how the sun and stars

reflect.” Your tears fall freely now and you squeeze your eyes shut as you say the next words along with him.

“Long, messy strokes, none of that shy nonsense. Bold clashing with the subdued tones. Paint outside the lines.”

You place your forehead on his, “passion is not perfect.” Your eyes flash open as you still, you hadn’t heard his voice. You peer at his face to see his eyes closed, his chest no longer rising.

“Zarik,” you whisper, the sound coming out like that of a growl, “do not leave me. Please. You’re not done here! You haven’t conquered all that you set out to conquer.” You feel something squeeze your fingers and glance down to see his hand wrapped around yours. His eyes are focused on you, softer than you’ve ever seen. He says no words but you understood him. He was always good at conveying how he felt without words, using his body language and eyes to let you know exactly what was on his mind.

And as he passed onto the next life, you knew. He did indeed conquer all that he wished.