

Chapter 148: To Forget is Divine

Lysette closed her eyes and fluttered her wings, floating just off the ground as she waited for her love. And Mirae took the lead, wrapping their arms around Lysette and kissed her deeply and passionately. If the Chancellor was watching, spying on them, then so be it. For all Lysette could be bothered to care at the moment, she was only too happy to make him bear witness to her being madly and blissfully in love and enjoying the passion of her relationship.

She followed Mirae's dance of hands and tongues, allowing all but one of her consciousnesses to focus entirely on every touch, every feeling, each and every exquisite sensation of belonging entirely to her love, malleable to their touch and theirs alone. And every touch, every glancing stroke of Mirae's fingers against her arms or waist or shoulders or neck or ears sent innumerable tingles down her spine, made the hairs on the back of her neck and arms alike stand up on end. It was all Lysette could do to try and sate her insatiable desire, her unquenchable thirst for her love, while still knowing that enemies abound all around, eager to take advantage of any momentary lapse in judgement or perception to strike.

It wasn't until after some ten minutes of passionate embrace that Lysette finally realized that she and Mirae were no longer on top of Sky Gardens Tower, but instead hovering high above the floating city. Lysette buried her face into Mirae's shoulder and wiped her watery eyes upon their blouse as she dissolved her legs and wrapped her lower body around Mirae's waist.

"It was a lot easier before, Mirae," Lysette started. "Go to the Academy, learn how my Godslayer powers work. Get stronger, inflict my Reciprocity in full upon Asterion and his Inquisitorius. That was the original plan.

"But now, I'm having to make decisions that aren't so easy, not so straightforward, where the answers aren't obvious, if there even are good answers. Recruiting followers, making decisions

which will determine the lives or deaths of hundreds, even thousands of people. And knowing that if I make one mistake, misjudge not just my own abilities, but of my friends, my followers, or my enemies, that people will die. And maybe not even me.”

Mirae held Lysette tighter. *“The fact that you are so burdened by such thoughts only proves that you are the right goddess for me. And far better than nearly every other deity that I’ve met.”*

“I love you, Mirae.”

“I love you too, Lysette. But please also remember. You can’t do it all yourself, and you shouldn’t be expected to either. You have me. You have Serrena, and Dani, and Kristil and Nicholas and Amalia too. And everyone back in Ciricu. Your actions have changed the lives of many people for the better. And I promise you, plenty more people will come to your aid. Because my goddess is worthy of such support.”

“Mirae, two months ago, before any of this happened, before I knew anything of Cultivators beyond hushed whispers. Back when I was human, I thought gods were supposed to be perfect. Supposed to have all the answers.”

“Whatever gave you that impression, my love?”

“I don’t know. I guess I just thought that’s what gods were. Seeing the state of the world, maybe I should have known then. But I definitely know now that we’re no different than humans in that regard. We’re prone to the exact same fears and guilt, pride and temptation that humans feel every day.

“The only difference is that we’re far more powerful than most humans, and we’re capable of screw-ups on a far larger and more catastrophic scale. It’s so obvious in retrospect.”

Mirae wrapped their arms even tighter around Lysette's chest, stroking her back and occasionally sliding up to her shoulders and giving them a massage with icy fingers. Lysette yelped at the sudden cold before purring into Mirae's shoulders. And then she slithered her head up and gave Mirae a kiss on the cheek.

Mirae responded with a kiss on the lips. "It's okay, Lysette, my love. I know there will be times that will be stressful for you. Maybe even all the time. But that just means that you've not surrendered your humanity completely like Saffron had warned we demigods have a tendency to do."

"I- I don't know, Mirae. I'm scared."

"It's okay, Lysette. Let it all out. I'm here for you."

"I- I'm scared, Mirae. So scared. Not scared about all the warring, or the assassins, or my fight with the Chancellor. I'm scared of losing you. Scared of losing the one I love most because of what I did tonight."

"What you did?"

"I used Aura of Intimidation. Multiple times. Even though I know you said I shouldn't. I- I wasn't going to let them do what they wanted to with Silver. And I didn't want to kill them either. Maybe there was another, better way. One that didn't involve suppressing their very will and sense of self, but in the heat of the moment, as I watched Silver's mind get torn apart and the residual effects on my own self, I... I justified it to myself. And worse still, I-"

"It's okay, Lysette. Let it out. Let it all out, love."

"I- A part of me enjoyed it, Mirae. Enjoyed taking those Chief Operatives' minds and bending their will to my point of view. Just like a part of me enjoyed killing Lacos, enjoyed killing the assassins back in Marol, all but salivates at the prospect of finally seeing Asterion

dead at my hand. And I'm worried that this part of me is going to lead to people I care about getting hurt. Because of my latent bloodthirst."

"That's just who Lyse is. What it means to be the Demigoddess of Reciprocity." Mirae stroked Lysette's cheek. "It is at the very core of your being to exact retribution upon those who you have wronged. For you to go against that compulsion, one tied to your very divinity, requires no small effort. No small *sacrifice*. That you feel this way— conflicted, uncertain, hesitant— does not make you a bad person, Lysette. Just the opposite.

"Mirae, I—"

Mirae kissed Lysette before the former could finish her sentence.

"And need I remind you, love," Mirae messaged through the still-open telepathic link while continuing to kiss Lysette. *"That I too am a demigod in my own right. And my Devotion compels me to remind you that my love, my loyalty to you, is absolute. If you wished me to follow you into the depths of the Infernal realm, you would merely need to speak the word and I would dive in after you.*

"And yes, I know I said that you shouldn't use Aura of Intimidation cavalierly. But I would say that using it to save someone's life, or to avoid taking another's life, are both perfectly valid uses of this ability. And you must have thought that there was some use for it as well, given that you didn't rid your Spark of the ability and use that Essence to Cultivate some different technique."

"I did, but— I wasn't thinking when I acted. Not much, anyway. All I saw was Silver's mind being snatched away from them, and deciding in that moment that I could either let that happen, I could spill blood and slay Chief Operative Thirteen and possibly countless others, or I could

use Aura of Intimidation. Maybe if I had talked first, or tried to reach an understanding before I rushed into action then maybe I could have—”

Mirae relented from their kiss and pinched Lysette between the neck and shoulders. Lysette gasped and looked at her love with an incredulous stare, eyes and mouth both agape. But Mirae only stuck out their tongue and shook their head.

“I will have none of that from my goddess, Lyse. My goddess made a decision that she believed was right, based on the best of her abilities and knowledge at the time, including the knowledge of what she believed was right. And even then, she feels guilt and desires to commune with her love and disciple on the matter. I don’t believe those are the actions of one who is acting with sanctimony in her heart.”

Lysette took a long and deep breath, taking in her love’s words and reflecting upon them. They made a lot of sense, especially the parts about being uncertain and seeking guidance from others. And Mirae wasn’t wrong about her going against thoughts emanating from deep within her. She did want to inflict her Reciprocity in full upon a great number of people, but one thing stopped her, when she really thought about who she was.

It was, as she had already understood before, her privilege and responsibility not just to embody Reciprocity, but to define what it meant both for herself and for Aimarion writ large. And as far as she was concerned, Reciprocity did not always have to be backward facing. It did not have to be retributive toward past wrongs, but could be proactive, seeking to start a virtuous cycle rather than perpetuating a ruinous one.

Some wrongs would necessitate retributive justice. Innocent dead demanded recompense. But that recompense did not always need to be a life for a life. Sometimes it did, and maybe that’s what the palace and the Assassins’ Guild were collectively trying to solve in their own

way. The palace to remind people that a life for a life meant that two people ended up dead instead of only one. And the Guild to make sure that if it was to be two, that it was only two and not potentially thousands more.

“Mirae, love, there’s one more thing I wanted to ask you about, on a far less deep note.”

“Ask away, my love.”

“It’s about Silver. *They*,” Lysette emphasized, “have been going through some things not unlike what you said you went through four years ago with your name and identity. I apologize, but I did sort of... volunteer you to talk with them about that. I just figured they could use a supportive person to talk to, one who can relate to whatever they are going through. Because I can understand in words, but I can’t relate to what they’re going through in the same way.”

“Lysette?”

“Yes, Mirae?”

“Don’t apologize for that. Never apologize for that. If I could have had one person to help me back when I was trying to figure myself out, figure out all those feelings I’d had at the time, it would have made things so much easier. And, both for myself and as your disciple, it is my honor and privilege to pay forward my experiences to help those who have come after me.”

“Thank you, love.” Lysette smiled.

“I’m glad to see you’re feeling better now, Lysette. Do you want to stay up here for a little while longer, or would you like to head back down?”

“I’d like to stay up here with you, but after dealing with the Assassins’ Guild for several hours and then teleporting out of the Undercity, I’m a little behind in terms of Essence accumulation leading up to the showdown with the Chancellor. So, I think I need to set my

personal wants aside and do my duties as a demigoddess to my followers and make sure I'm ready to smite our enemies.”

“Glad to hear it, love. And as my goddess demands, so shall it be.”