

## [David Lance POV]

The mission had been a success, at least to a certain degree, and with Kent safe and sound in the tower of fate, it was time to go back to the base. By the time we arrived at the base, the sun had barely risen above the horizon. The air inside the ship was thick and filled with tension, sure, we had won, but it didn't feel like a victory.

We had all felt powerless, without an ounce of control, and the feeling wasn't welcomed at all. The truth was, as much as it pained us to admit it, that we had been massively underprepared for the challenges we had faced today.

Raven walked toward me with a serious look on her face, placing a hand on my right shoulder. "We need to talk."

I nodded and followed her into my quarters. ~What's on your mind, Rae Rae?~

Raven paused, looking at the wall behind me for a moment before she replied. "We barely made it out of there today."

I nodded. ~That's... a pretty accurate way to describe our mission today.~

Raven ran a hand through her hair as she sighed. "If Kent hadn't been there if he hadn't intervened when he did..." Her words trailed off, but I knew what she was trying to say. If Kent hadn't been there, we would have all died.

I frowned before taking a seat on my bed, inviting Raven to do the same. ~We were lucky, there's no denying that. Klarion was clearly out of our league.~

Raven nodded, taking my invitation to sit. "He was toying with us."

I sighed, giving Raven a look before leaning back against my pillows. ~Like cats, play with mice.~

Raven paused for a moment, her violet-blue eyes staring into mine. "He could've killed you, and I would've been powerless to stop him."

~But we survived, and that's all that matters right now, isn't it?~ I replied, my emotions welling up inside of me as I remembered my encounter with Klarion.

Raven let out a shaky breath, her hands trembling slightly. "I know we did, but it was far too close for my comfort."

I smiled, playfully pushing her shoulder. ~See, I knew you love me.~

Raven smiled for a brief moment before returning to her usual mask of indifference, the worry still present in her eyes. "Love is a strong wrong, more like... I tolerate you, barely."

I rolled my eyes at her response. ~So, now what?~

Raven sighed; her eyes fixed on the floor. "We can't count on luck next time."

I nodded. Luck, while good, and a part of all, was a very unreliable factor for all parts, one that no one should trust on; unless they can affect probability itself, which wasn't the case for any of us. ~Any idea where to start? I mean, you are our magic expert.~

Raven turned to look at me, her eyes narrowed in thought. "I talked with Mr. Nelson for a bit before we left the tower, and he offered me some guidance and books to help me, and I accepted his offer."

I blinked; a bit surprised by her answer. It wasn't like Raven to accept help, at least when it came to magic. ~Does that mean you will learn Order magic?~

Raven nodded. "My magical affinities do not align with the school of Order, which makes this project all the more difficult, but affinities can be trained and, in time, develop beyond original limitations. It's just harder that way."

~I'm sure Kent will prove to be an excellent teacher. I mean, age and wisdom do go by hand more often than not, right?~ I smiled, happy to see Raven having someone to help her with her magic studies.

Raven turned to look at me, her expression unreadable. "Now, all that's left is you."

I frowned, not understanding what she meant. ~What do you mean?~

Raven stood up; her arms crossed. "Klarion was interested in you, very interested. We all heard his last words before he teleported away."

I was trying to forget that, at least for today. ~I remember vividly.~

Raven sighed, her shoulders slumping ever so slightly. "We can't really stop him if he comes for you, not as we are. But I have a suggestion that might help you against him."

~I'm all ears,~ I replied, eager to hear anything that could help me against Klarion.

Raven paused for a moment as if debating whether or not to continue. "The Mark of Asteria."

Asteria, that name sounds familiar. ~Isn't Asteria, a greek goddess?~

Raven nodded. "Asteria is the Titan goddess of nocturnal oracles and falling stars. She was also considered by many as the protector of young children during the lone starry nights."

~And getting her mark will help me in which way exactly?~ I asked, still not fully understanding where this was going.

Raven nodded slowly. "It won't protect you completely, but the Mark of Asteria is said to give its bearer the power to see things that others can't or won't, as well as a natural resistance to many schools of magic, like Chaos."

~I have read enough about the Greek Gods to know that owing them a favor is never a good thing,~ I replied, not too keen on the idea of making deals with deities.

"It's not a deal with the gods. It's a spell Asteria left behind, one that found its way to Azarath," Raven explained, her voice gentle.

Well, that makes me feel a little bit better. ~Alright then, if you think getting the mark will help me, I trust you.~

Raven smiled for the briefest of moments. "I will start preparing the things we need for the spell. Hopefully, the mark will be enough to help."

I smiled before a frown came to my face. ~If the Mark is as beneficial as you proclaim, wouldn't it be better for everyone on the team to get it?~

Raven nodded. "It would, but the ingredients required for the spell are exceedingly rare, most of them can't no longer be found anymore. I have most of them, and it's only because I saved them from Azarath; I never thought I would use them, and for the most part, they were nothing but nostalgic trinkets I had collecting dust in my room. Our encounter with Klarion reminded me of them; unfortunately for the rest of the team, I barely have enough for one mark."

I sighed. ~I see.~

"Don't leave the base. The preparations won't take long," Raven replied before leaving my room through a portal.

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I stood outside of Raven's door, as she had called me, telling me the spell was almost ready. Taking a deep breath, I hesitated in front of the door for a moment before finally deciding to go inside.

Inside, the room was dark, and the only light came from a few candles that were burning on the nightstands. In the center of the room was a small table, and Raven was sitting in front of it with her eyes closed.

"I'm almost finished," Raven said quietly as she gestured for me to come closer. "Sit."

It looked like I was about to sell my soul to the devil.

Taking a deep breath, I approached the table warily, taking a seat as she had told me to do. Without opening her eyes, Raven reached out to take my hand. Her touch was hot, burning, like fire, ready to scorch my skin off.

"Don't move," Raven said, and before I could wonder too much what would happen next, she began to chant in a language I didn't recognize. For a few moments, this chant continued until I started to feel a strange energy flowing from her hand to mine, like a snake making its way up my arm.

As this continued, the candle flames grew taller and wilder, casting eerie shadows on the walls as the hair on my arms stood up. Suddenly, Raven opened her eyes to reveal them

glowing, a white, blinding glow that expanded from her face to mine until there was nothing but white, and I felt as if my body was being consumed by a raging fire.

"It is done," Raven said as the light began to fade, leaving a burning sensation on my arm.

Looking down at my arm, I saw a black symbol there, one that looked vaguely like a star. ~So, this is the mark?~ I asked as I traced the lines of the mark with my finger.

"It is," Raven replied with a short nod.

~I don't feel any different,~ I commented as I looked back up at her.

"It may take some time for the effects to be noticeable," Raven replied calmly. "Besides, most of the effects are passive in nature, like the one I hope it will help you against Klarion."

~Hopefully, it will. If not, at the very least, I got some protection against other magical entities,~ I replied, giving the mark another look. ~That, and I also got a cool tattoo, so, even losing, I win with this.~

Raven rolled her eyes at me. "You should rest."



I smiled, giving her a small nod. I was quite tired from everything, and taking a nap felt like a wonderful idea right now.