

Ivore smelled them approaching from another direction but did not get to his feet just yet. The outdoor café was just beginning to fill with others as the sun rose into the sky and he liked to enjoy his tea as he watched the sun come up. They may have been exiled here, but they had done as much as they could to make it their home and to seem like they were free. Revia had gotten him to start drinking tea many years ago, making him switch from the dark, vile tasting and muddy liquid that he called coffee. Ivore had come to like the taste and it had grown on him so that now all he drank was tea.

"Ivore my friend." The voice spoke from his left and Ivore got to his feet. "A very good morning to you."

Ivore smiled as he turned and looked at Ch'eldo Iaaldo. He was the oldest of any within their compound at close to four million years of age, and he was revered among both his people and the Lycavorians here. Ivore glanced up to his face and felt the brief flash of shame touch him as it always did. Nyser had taken Ch'eldo's eyes in a fit of rage when Ch'eldo had refused to help him. Ivore had imposed his body between Ch'eldo and his brother saving his life. Now he wore an intricately designed and detailed cloth strip over both his eyes, but it always seemed to Ivore that Ch'eldo had never really lost his sight. The man was always moving among the compound with his ever-present staff and it did not seem to hamper him in any way.

"And a fine one it is Ch'eldo." Ivore spoke as he pulled the chair out next to him. He looked at the second man and nodded his head with a smile. "Ra'tel... a good morning to you as well."

The younger man smiled. "A bit chilly for my tastes, but this has never seemed to bother you or my father Lord Ivore." He answered.

Ivore chuckled and nodded his head. "My Beloved Revia yells at me often enough for leaving the windows open in the cold." He said. "Perhaps I will one day listen to her."

"Ha!" Ch'eldo chortled loudly as he settled into the chair. "That will be a momentous day! Lady Revia will run singing through the streets!"

Ivore laughed warmly now. "No doubt she will." He said as he returned to his chair and Ra'tel sat on his father's opposite side.

"I trust you have brought an ample supply of Revia's tea?" Ch'eldo spoke as he got comfortable.

Ivore nodded his head as he began to pour two additional cups of the steaming liquid. "When have I ever disappointed you Ch'eldo?"

"Well there was the time that..." Ch'eldo began.

"Father that was not Lord Ivore's fault. That was mine. And it was three hundred and ten thousand years ago." Ra'tel spoke with a smile.

"But he did promise me Revia's tea." Ch'eldo pressed.

Ivore moved the first cup between Ch'eldo's hands and watched as he lifted it to his lips and took a long sip. "Then let me make it up to you now." He spoke as he watched him drink.

Ch'eldo smiled and lowered the cup half way to the table. "Ahhh. Like a gift from the gods themselves." He spoke as Ra'tel also sipped his tea. He set the cup fully on the table and reached out to place his hand on Ivore's wrist. "So... tell me what has you so befuddled as to call me in the middle of the night and ask to speak

with us first thing this morning Ivore. There is not much that rattles you my old friend.”

Ivore nodded his head and reached around to take the data pad from the pouch he wore on his belt. He laid it on the small table in front of Ch'eldo. “This.” He spoke softly.

Ch'eldo let his hands drop to the data pad and he held it up, running his fingers across the small screen slowly. He finally held it out to Ra'tel. “What is this?” He asked finally.

Ivore leaned closer to him at the table. “My foul brother Nyser may have taken your eyes Ch'eldo Iaaldo, but he did not take your sight. I know this to be true my friend.”

Ch'eldo turned his head to look at him. “Perhaps.” He said.

Ra'tel's eyes grew wider when he saw what was on the pad and he looked first at Ivore and then to his father. “Father!” He gasped.

Ch'eldo held up his hand. “I know.” He said softly. “Ivore... when did these first start to appear on the shoulders of you, Revia and your children?”

Ivore looked at him with wide eyes. “How did you...?” He rasped out the words. “You know what it is?”

Ch'eldo nodded his head. “I do.” He answered him. “It is... it is something that I never thought I would ever see.”

“Then what is it?” Ivore asked. “Revia and I have been... we have been beside ourselves because we cannot discover how this has happened. Our children. Our grandchildren. All of them... all of them have this mark on our left shoulders Ch'eldo. For three days now! It... it frightens Revia. She believes it to be a bad omen of things to come.”

Ch'eldo shook his head. “No.” He told him firmly. “This... this is not something that you should be frightened of.”

“What is it?” Ivore asked again. “Is it a curse of some kind?”

“A curse?” Ra'tel gasped. “Lord Ivore... this... this is no curse.”

“Then what is it?” Ivore asked once more.

Ch'eldo grasped Ivore's hand tightly. “Retrieve Revia from the school and meet us in our Sanctuary Ivore.”

“Why?” Ivore asked.

Ch'eldo looked directly at Ivore, and he swore he could see his eyes moving beneath that cloth. “There is something that you must see. Hurry now. If you, Revia and your children have worn this symbol for three days, there is not much time left.”

“Left for what?” Ivore demanded.

“Trust me Ivore.” Ch'eldo told him softly. “Bring your beloved Revia to the sanctuary and you will discover what is happening. Hurry!”