

Sunlight poured in through the glass ceilings of the healing ward. It wasn't a large space, the people of Dacwen were usually healthy so the medical center didn't have to accommodate large numbers.

Saraya lay on a comfortable mattress in the recovery section, her eyes closed. A holographic terminal floated to the left of her bedside, displaying her vitals and a progress bar showing how quickly the injuries she'd suffered during the fight were healing. She was covered in a thin silver sheet that tucked around her body like a cocoon, absorbing the sunlight and accelerating her healing. All Dacwenians were healed by sunlight.

Narozen Ladanya sat next to her daughter's bedside. Her elbow pressed on the chair's cushioned arm, her aged, elegant fingers resting against her mouth. She was not looking at her daughter, but at some point in the distance, pulled into the complicated thoughts moving through her mind.

Her guards stood a respectful distance back towards the room's arched entrance. Jochlan stood behind her chair, their face an unreadable mask that stayed focused on Saraya.

"Narozen—"

Ladanya made a negative sound, her light gray eyes focusing again as she turned her head to regard Jochlan. "Don't. You're not responsible for her choices."

"But I am responsible for her safety."

"She's here. She's fine, Jochlan. We can only protect them from so much. That's why we train them. You did your job. Don't make me say it again."

Jochlan drew straighter, nodding. "Yes, Narozen."

The room fell back into an easy silence, each retreating to the weight of their thoughts. It didn't last long, and Ladanya sighed in the seconds before the approaching raised forces tore through the room as if she anticipated their arrival.

"She's your sister!"

"She's a law breaker. It's not the first time." Savil's tone was patient, devoid of emotion. A sharp contrast to the clear frustration in Atomeia's.

"Cusamine, Savil, are you not even concerned about what happened?"

Ladanya rose, touching a gentle hand over Saraya's sleeping forehead. The gentleness of the moment lasted only a second before she turned, stepping towards her bickering children and said over her shoulder to Jochlan, "Wake her."

"My concern doesn't change what has to be done. I am the Justicar, this is her second offense," Savil said.

"Enough. Lower your voices. This ward belongs to the healing," Ladanya snapped the words to her children though her gaze focused on Atomeia.

Atomeia was use to the weight of her mother's disapproving eyes, but she did lower her tone when she asked next, "Is she all right? Do we know who did it?"

"Your sister is fine. And no, we don't know who is behind the attack yet."

"Mother-

"You should not have brought them here, Savil." Ladanya turned that disapproving gaze to her son. "She would have been escorted to the justice build as is custom."

Savil gave his mother the same patient tone. "She is a flight risk. And the people need to see we take transgressions from the royal family as seriously as that of any other citizen."

Ladanya's mouth pinched with the flare of anger, though her tone remained as level as her son's. "This family has never given the people reason to believe otherwise."

"Agreed. And I am ensuring your fair legacy remains intact. Something it seems your daughter cares little about and seeks to destroy."

"Bullshit, Savil," Atomeia snapped, glaring at her brother. "You're doing to this to fire up the opposition. You want the MFK (men for king) to see her in chains, so they can bark their bullshit louder at the next General Assembly."

Savil sighed as if his patience was finally beginning to waver. "I didn't break the law, Atomeia," his head motioned towards the interior of the room. "She did."

"Your disloyal to your family and you suck. Why do you hate us so much?"

"Atomeia, enough." Ladanya's gaze did not leave her son.

Savil smirked. "How very adult of you big sister. I'm sure you give the people of Dacwen so much confidence that you can be a more acceptable heir. I'm not the one giving the MFK

fuel to their claims, the women of this family are, so spare me your vitriol. I'm the only one not disgracing our mother and actually doing my job."

Atomeia mouth's opened –

"Meia, stop. He's right. This is on me," Saraya approached her family slowly, dressed now in her uniform. Jochlan stood near her side, hovering almost like a mother hen.

Atomeia lost all interest in what Savil was saying and moved around their mother, wrapping her arms tightly around her sister. "Are you all right? Did you get a good look at the assholes who did it?"

Saraya hugged her back tightly. "I'm okay, and no I didn't see who they were."

"Cusamine, Saya," Atomeia whispered. "Why did you do it? They were just humans, they die all the time."

Saraya squeezed her twin tighter, thinking back to that moment. "I don't know, I just... I couldn't let them die. Not when it was my fault."

"We'll find who did this." Atomeia kissed her sister on the cheek and finally released her from the tight hug.

Ladanya watched her daughters embrace. Savil yawned, politely covering his mouth.

(bridge these scenes)

Ladanya stepped forward, framing Saraya's face between her hands. For a moment she said nothing, just looked at her eldest with an unreadable expression on her face. After a time, she placed a gentle kiss on her daughter's forehead a sharp contrast to the words she spoke. "You have ruined this family, Saraya."

Saraya stiffened in her mother's embrace, the words slamming into her like a blow from a tanarull.

Atomeia blinked in surprise. "Mom!"

Ladanya said nothing else, simply released Saraya stepping aside. "Take her, Savil."

The hot press of tears burned against the back of Saraya's eyes. She tightened her jaw, refusing to shed them. Staring straight ahead, she moved in line with her brother and the justicars, following them out of the medical ward.

“How dare you say that to her,” Atomeia glared at her mother and without waiting for a response stormed out behind the entourage that had her sister.

Ladanya watched the backs of her children. “Jochlan.”

“Narozen.”

“Find who did this. Quickly. Our time grows short.”

“It will be done.” Jochlan made move to leave but their steps paused. Jochlan turned to face the Narozen, concern lacing his quiet tone. “Your son... I fear he plots against you.”

“No, Jochlan.” Sadness spread over Ladanya’s face. “Not me.”