

Reborn

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She stood there at the edge of the cliff, watching the waves beat against the edge. She spread her hands out to the side and felt the cool air cut her skin. Her dark hair and flowing white dress wrapped her like a cloud. She sat there waiting, watching, as she had done for eternities.

It had started raining outside. The lightning lit up the lavender sky, and the thunder boomed with a fury that shook the ground. Chroma couldn't feel the rain soaking her dress, and dripping from her hair like a cloud. She had decided on this house. The resident was an interesting prospect. Perfect for bringing everything back.

This house didn't have a well- built porch. No flowers or paint decorated the outside. There was simply a door, waiting for her like the end of a story. Oddly, Chroma smiled. He would be perfect.

She knocked on the door. A man opened the door a few seconds later. He was tall and solidly built. With a pallor like the snow and eyes like ice. His forehead had wrinkles, and his dark hair was peppered with white.

“Do I know you?” He said gruffly, his voice like sandpaper.

“Uh no,” Chroma said, twisting her hands. The man started to close his door. Chroma lunged for the door keeping it open. The man stopped, looked at her hands keeping the door open, and raised an eyebrow. “I-uh just moved here” Chroma bit out. The man looked at her, blinked, and gestured for her to go on. “I was visiting the neighbors, and I met Tia and she said that I should come and meet you next,” Chroma stammered. Tia? She hoped she'd gotten that right. The man stopped her in the middle of her rambling to state

“Tia said that I was a good neighbor to visit?” To Chroma's utter and complete surprise he bellowed a laugh while shaking his head. He had warmed a little at the mention of Tia, and he opened the door to let her in. His interior was so bleak, Chroma was a little startled. Humans usually liked the colors. There was almost no furniture in the main room. A couple of wooden chairs were set up in the corners, and the only source of light was the window. Thunder boomed again.

“My name's Chroma,” she said, remembering to shiver while looking around the room.

“Chroma, huh? Never heard that one before. Where are you from?”

“The north, near the coast” Chroma murmured vaguely. That wasn't true, but she needed to present herself as a human. Aleth's eyes narrowed, and he opened his mouth to talk, but Chroma interrupted him by stepping forward.

What had caught Chroma's eye was the backboard against the far wall. It was laden with numerous weapons attached to it. A bow staff, an ax, multiple swords. She stepped towards it, fascinated. She had never quite understood the weapons. They were so harsh and brutal. But based on her memory, the heroes usually carried them. There was a huge arching blade with a

leather grip that was carved with runes straight in the center of the board. It was perfect. She glanced at Aleth, who hesitated before giving a brief nod. Her hand curled around the blade, picking it up and letting the blade rest in her left hand.

She presented it to him like she was giving him an award. Aleth just stared. She frowned. Maybe she had to show how to use it?

She ever so carefully took a stance with Aleth looking at her with a little confusion, closed her eyes, and went through the stretches that a friend once had taught her. Back, forward, parry, strike, lunge, again, a different rhythm. The feeling rushed back. A memory came to mind. It was sunny and the clouds were lazily crossing the sky. She could faint laughter coming from—No. She couldn't get lost in those again. She shoved them down abruptly and focused on her rhythms.

She went through the rhythm again with renewed vigor. On her third repetition, a hand carefully stopped her blade. She froze and glanced up at blue eyes looking down at her. Of course, she'd forgotten about custom, niceties, and first impressions. She had just walked into a man's house as if she owned the place. She was just so tired. Blushing fiercely, she put it back on the board. She needed another way to show him. Aleth shook his head minutely before taking the sword back off the board and placing it in her hands. She was confused, but took it into her hands.

"As strange as this encounter has been it does feel good to finally see someone else wield the sword for once, Aleth spoke while carefully adjusting her grip seemingly taking everything in stride, he moved her hand so her thumb was placed a little bit higher on the leather. "Careful with your left foot there," He said while taking his foot, and mirroring hers while shifting it into the place he wanted. Chroma followed. "Now, try again." Chroma went through her stretch, and she was both a little pleased and astonished to find that it had become a bit easier. He taught her another one and gave her a couple of tips with her positioning. He had even offered to spar with her, but Chroma refused, knowing that she still had places to be. She was stunned that she was still learning things from them.

"Thanks, Aleth." Chroma stuttered, slipping over his name. That was his name, right? She hoped she had remembered right. Aleth walked to the middle of the room and sat down in one of his rickety chairs motioning to the one across from him. She tentatively took a seat and looked at him finally recognizing the look in his eyes.

"I don't trust you," Aleth said, quite frankly interrupting her train of thought. Chroma didn't even know why she had bothered. She didn't have time to act angry or accused. She had done that before. Before all of this. It had been a waste of time. So she met his eyes. Blue to blue. She closed her eyes, and asked a little curiously,

"Why?"

"Well for starters, you know my name. I was sure I didn't introduce myself." Aleth said suspiciously. Ah, of course, he had caught on to that. They revered the truth after all. It had been

the basis for many societies. “Of course, someone could have told you, but... You act like you’ve known it for a long time.” Chroma opened her eyes and just stared.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.” Chroma said firmly. They had never understood the concept.

“Try me.” Aleth declared. Chroma opened her mouth before thinking better of it and sank into the chair.

“You wouldn’t understand.” She mumbled. She stood, making her way to the door. This was useless. She pushed it open and was assaulted by pelting raindrops. She put one foot on the wet dewy ground before a rough hand grabbed her wrist.

“Tell me,” Aleth said, almost pleading, icy blue eyes digging into her. “I feel like I should know, you seem so familiar.” Chroma yanked her hand away, and she finally snapped. All of the anger, pain, and loss reared up inside of her. All the time she had spent.

“I have told you before, hundreds upon thousands of times.” She yelled. Aleth took a step back. “I have pleaded and yelled and cried until my throat ran raw” She shook her head. “You don’t think we’ve had this *same exact conversation* before?” Aleth just stared at her, bewildered. “You don’t think I’ve tried this before? If humanity wasn’t so keen on dying maybe I’d actually make some progress with it” She stormed away from the stupid house, and stupid humanity, and its stupid, stupid ways. He called to her, but she was no longer in sight.

She found her way back to the cliffs again. The rain had stopped, and the sun was peeking through the clouds again. She didn’t even know why she was crying. This had happened before. But she missed it. All of it. The colors, the smells, the festivals. She just wanted them back. She sat there for a long time. The sun had started setting, and the moon was seen above the clouds. A hand touched her shoulder. She startled a little before realizing who it was.

“Hello, Death.” Chroma said hiccuping and wiping her tears. “Have you come to collect?” Death laughed, his broad shoulders shaking with the sound.

“Why would I do that? You’re my only companion, Time.” Chroma stiffened.

“I go by Chroma now.” She mumbled looking up at him.

“Changed your name again? You do realize that you’ll always be Time. Always be an eternal being, no matter the lengths you take to act human” Death said in his deep baritone, still chuckling a little.

“Shut up,” Chroma said, but it was mostly in jest. Death sat down next to her on the still- wet grass. He brushed the stray pieces of Chroma’s hair behind her ear.

“What’s wrong?” He said quietly. The waves crashed in the distance.

“I went to visit them again.” Chroma said, pulling her knees to her chest. The wind was playing with her hair. Death sighed.

“Why? You know it’s pointless, time passes too quickly for us to keep a hold on to them.”

“Life has to exist, humans have to exist.” Chroma said stubbornly.

“But they died, years ago, it’s just us now.” Death said softly.

“They’re still there! That means that they can remember.” Chroma said, standing.

“No it doesn’t, they’re only husks of what they used to be. They don’t have anything to sustain them!” Death said standing up beside her. “I can’t let you live like this.” He said carefully.

“I thought you just said life was dead.” Chroma fired back. He huffed.

“You know that’s not what I meant.” Death said, somewhat trying to reassure her.

“Why don’t they rise? How come none of them attempt to bring some measure of life back?” Chroma said, frustration evident in every inch of her body.

“They’ve forgotten, Time. They forgot ages ago.” Death said exasperation coloring his tone. Implying that this was not the first time they had had this conversation.

“Then why are they still there?” Chroma asked.

“You know the answer to that.” Death said quietly.

“They must be remembering then or maybe life is coming back?” Chroma continued to insist, beginning to pace. Death lost his patience.

“They’re here because you’re keeping them here!” Death hollered at her. Chroma froze. “You are recycling them, bringing them back again and again. You have to let them GO, Time.” Death was out of breath by the time he finished. His cheeks were flushing red. He mumbled an apology.

“I can’t leave them. They’re my family.” Chroma said firmly, making no room for an argument. She started walking back to the village.

“You can’t, that’s not fair to them-” He was cut off abruptly by Chroma speaking.

“I can and I will”

“Where are you going?”

“In the stories humans used to tell, there was always a hero.” Chroma spoke hopefully while throwing her hands up.

“You really think you’re going to find a human worthy enough? They forgot everything, Time! Especially the heroes.”

“It’s worth a shot,” Chroma said, her voice rising. Death pinched his nose, exhausted.

“Fine, but promise something.”

“What?” Chroma stopped and spun on her heel to look at him.

“Promise me that this is the last time. You can’t keep dawdling around acting like a human. You’re a being that belongs to the universe.” Death said, locking his eyes with hers.

“No.” She said turning away and making her way down the cliff more forcefully.

“No?”

“What part of ‘they’re my family’ do you not understand?” Death exhaled before speaking again.

“Fine, but remember that it’s easier to forget them.” Chroma ceased walking, almost making Death run into her.

“I know,” She said quietly. “I’m sorry for not telling you that I came back here...” She trailed off while reluctantly turning around. But Death was gone. She crossed her arms in

exasperation before walking towards another village. A bit in the future. She opened a satchel on her side and pulled out a scroll with a name and face on it. This woman would be it.

Later (centuries, maybe milienna, we're not sure).

Death had been right, they had forgotten the heroes. There weren't any. Time had aged in her trials across the world. Her hair had gray streaks, and her skin had lost the youthful tone. She had tried. For centuries. Through universes. They hadn't come back. She listened to the waves crashing into the cliffside. They brought her a little peace in this world. She had realized after so many years that Time and Death were the only constants. It was life that drifted away. She sat down on the same dewy grass, and sighed. She was finally ready to forget. So she closed her eyes, and left them behind. She moved on. Came where she was needed. Didn't always come where she was called, but she remembered that village. Remembered her quest. Went to it sometimes. Was forbidden to go to it other times. She moved on from them. But remembered them all the same.

The little village that Time had visited so many years ago was growing old. The vines had grown tall and wide, and the hedges were growing wild. No houses were visible to the naked eye. But in the center of the village, a fire burned, and in the distance, Time smiled on her old wooden chair. Moved on, she had, but given up hope, she hadn't. Death stood behind her, and he had a sad smile upon his face. He hadn't aged at all. He grasped her hand before disappearing into the dark.

They wouldn't be the same. They might not be heroes. They might not tell stories. They might not decorate with colors. But they would still live. Time was sure of it.