

## Witness

Ryun walked out of the Zenshuen gates with Anrosh and Lesamitrius following behind him. His conversation with the Zenshuen Sect Leader still weighing on his mind. Obviously, there was more to her interest than what she had said. What he didn't know was if that was something that he should look more into. Once, he wouldn't have cared, now... He had an obligation, he couldn't make the same mistakes he had before. At the very least he needed to learn what she wanted.

"Where were you?" Anrosh asked once they were half-way to their carriage.

"I was speaking with one of the Zenshuen Sect Leaders, the one that invited us," Ryun answered.

Anrosh and Lesamitrius exchanged a look. Then she spoke. "A Zenshuen Sect Leader invited us? What? Why would they bother? We are no one to them."

"I don't know, which is why I am bothered," Ryun said.

"Which Sect Leader was it?" Lesamitrius asked.

Ryun furrowed his brows, it wasn't that he was that bad with names really, he just didn't care for those who didn't seem important to him. "Selia... Jhan?"

Both of them stopped, staring at his back. He turned around and looked at them.

"You spoke with the Spear of Sorrow?" Anrosh asked, her voice awed. Even Lesamitrius looked properly impressed.

"I did, she offered for the Twilight Melody to become a direct subordinate of Zenshuen," Ryun said, before they could say anything he cut with his hand to the side. "I refused."

"What?" Anrosh nearly screamed. "Why?"

"Because I don't know the reason as to why she would want our sect. By your words we are not important, there is no reason for her to offer that."

He saw her reasoning battle her emotions, to her it would seem like an incredible opportunity.

“After that,” Ryun continued. “She offered to sponsor me personally, in the tournament. To get us access to places that we might not be able to get to.”

“That...” Anrosh didn’t know what to say about that.

“She asked me to think about it, talk it over with my people. Which I will do, once we get back to the—” Ryun frowned.

“What is it?” Anrosh asked, noticing the change in him immediately.

Ryun wasn’t quite sure what it was, but he felt... something tugging at him, coming from the direction of the plain stretching behind the Zenshuen compound. He had never felt anything like it, and yet it was also familiar to him.

“Go back to the compound,” he told them.

“Not until you tell me what is wrong,” Anrosh said stubbornly.

He glanced at her and smiled, she had come so far from the mother that had been so afraid in his presence. Now, she could stand there and glare at him with no fear.

“I don’t know exactly, one of my perks is... doing something,” he had a suspicion about what it was. “Don’t worry, I don’t think that it is anything dangerous. I just want to check it out.”

She kept her eyes on him for a long while, and then finally sighed.

“Fine. But after you come back we are talking about everything.”

Ryun walked across the plain, following the tugging sensation. There was a sense of urgency, of timing that came over him, and he hurried. He took to the air and soared from step to step, until finally he reached the source in a territory neighboring the Tournament one.

Before him stretched a large lake, and on the shore a woman sat on a stone.

Ryun dropped down silently, but the woman still somehow detected him.

“Did they send you?” she asked. “I should’ve known that they would’ve seen something, figured out what I planned to do.”

She turned, and Ryun saw her face. She was a human, with slightly pointed ears. Her face was smooth and young looking, but that meant nothing in this world. He couldn’t tell much about her expression with his eyes.

“No one sent me,” Ryun said. He was sure now, the woman was the source of the tugging.

She narrowed her eyes at him, and then tilted her head. “You are telling the truth,” she shook her head and turned around. “Just my luck, coming to the middle of nowhere to be alone and someone stumbles on me.”

She kept her head in the direction of the lake, and Ryun walked up to stand next to her. He didn’t get the feeling that she was hostile.

Finally, Ryun spoke. “What are you doing here, if I might ask?”

The woman glanced at him. “I was here first, why don’t you tell me what you are doing here? You are dressed for a party and there are none in this territory.”

Ryun blinked and then raised his hand, touching his mask. He had forgotten about that. He took the mask off. “I was...” he thought about what he should say, but in the end he didn’t really have anything to hide. “I was drawn here by one of my perks. I don’t know why.”

The woman blinked. “Truth again,” she murmured to herself. “Well isn’t that something.”

Ryun raised an eyebrow but she just turned to look back at the lake. He had a suspicion about why she was here. It was... instinct, his **Eternal Hunter: Reaper** perk was pulsing in a way that it had never done before. And there was just one part of that perk that he had never seen manifest. The ability to sense death.

He had always wondered why it didn’t work, he had been around death plenty of times and he never felt anything. Now he knew more about the Infinite Realm, he understood that death was not the end, that it was not the True Death. And his perk came from the Aspect of True Death.

Ryun stood there in silence, looking at the lake. The woman cast glances at him from time to time, obviously annoyed and impatient. But he didn't move. The sense of timing inside of him halted and he had his answer.

Finally she turned to face him and spoke. "Do you mind? I came here to be alone."

Ryun met her eyes, he couldn't feel any Qi from her, but he was certain that she was strong. An immortal at least.

"You do realize that there is no coming back from this? This will be your final decision, irreversible," Ryun said.

She blinked, her right hand tightened around the flask that she held behind her leg, hidden from his view but not his skill.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "They did send you after all," she nearly snarled.

"I was sent by no one," Ryun said slowly. "I.. I can feel what you are about to do."

She blinked. "You can feel what exactly?"

"You plan to kill yourself, not so that you may reach the afterlife, but so that you die a True Death."

The woman's face twitched, giving him his answer. He felt her Qi for the first time, a rolling and heavy power that threatened to overwhelm.

"I'm not here to stop you," Ryun said quickly, and she frowned.

"Why are you here then?" she asked.

He shrugged. "I don't know really. I came because this was the first time I felt something like this from my perk."

"So what? You just want to watch?" she mocked.

"I think," Ryun started. "That perhaps it might be easier if you are not alone, at the end."

The woman turned her eyes away and then brought her flask up in front of her. "I already did it," she said slowly.

Ryun tilted his head. "Did what?"

"Drank poison, I am already dying," she said. "The poison is seeping into my soul through my body."

Ryun could tell that the flask in her hand was still full.

“This,” she shook the flask. “It is just an accelerant. If I take it, it will speed up the process.”

“Ah,” Ryun said.

“It is supposed to be very painful, and take hours,” she said. “I figured that I might want to end it quicker. It took me nearly two decades to find an alchemist that could make an accelerant that could affect a soul burning poison.”

“You’ve been planning this for a long time then,” Ryun said.

“Yes,” she sighed.

“Can I stay with you then? Keep you company,” Ryun said.

“Yes,” she said again, softer, her voice shaking slightly.

“I am Ryun Nacht,” he introduced himself.

The woman did the same. “I’m Ullia Dar Ishi.”

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Ullia.”

With that, Ryun took a seat next to her on the wide stone and looked at the lake.

“Does it hurt,” he asked.

“Barely, it won’t start for a few hours yet,” she answered.

After a few minutes of silence, Ryun finally asked the most important question. “Why?”

“You are not going to convince me to change my mind. I’ve been planning this for centuries.”

“That is not my intention, all things have an end. I simply wish to understand,” Ryun told her.

She looked him in the eyes and then nodded.

“Because I am tired,” she said. “This world is... It is not a place I wish to live in any longer.”

“May I ask how old you are?” Ryun asked.

“Asking that of a lady is rude,” she chuckled, then shook her head. “I am one thousand and eighty six years old.”

“That is... a long life,” Ryun said.

“It is,” she nodded.

“You are Ranker then.”

“I am,” Ullia answered. “Sometimes, I can close my eyes and almost remember the world of before. Of a simpler life when the only things I worried about was getting good grades on my tests, and what was going to happen on the next episode of my favorite tv show. Now... I can’t even remember what it was that I watched.”

Ryun blinked. “Huh, I never realized it, I don’t remember either.”

Ullia turned to look at him.

“I am a Ranker too,” Ryun said before she could ask.

“What Iteration?”

“Seventh,” Ryun answered.

“That’s impossible, you would be too young to be an immortal—wait, I heard about a human Ranker, from the Seventh joining the High Division. I thought that it was just a rumor, you are him aren’t you?”

“I am.”

“Huh,” she shook her head. “How did you manage to get to immortal so quickly?”

“I don’t think that my Earth was like the others, and I was always good at Cultivation,” Ryun answered.

Ullia shrugged as if wasn’t that important to her, which it probably wasn’t, she had killed herself. Ryun wondered what that feeling inside of him meant, what he was supposed to do. Finally, after a few more minutes of silence, he spoke again.

“Why don’t you tell me a story,” Ryun said slowly.

“A story?” Ullia asked confused.

“Yes, a story about your life, about your journey. If you are going to be gone, I’d like to know, to remember.”

“What? You think that if I remember I’ll change my mind?”

“Not at all, I can tell that you won’t,” Ryun told her. “All life is a story, a journey, a book written by actions. This is the last chapter of your journey, and I simply wish to learn of those that came before.”

She didn’t say anything for a while. And then she started to speak. She told him about her early life on Earth, what she remembered of it at least. It was so similar to his own experience that he couldn’t help but remember his own life on Earth. His family, who he had put behind him so long ago. His

mother and father, who had probably died as soon as the Framework arrived. At least that is what he liked to think, that they were spared of the things that came after.

Then she spoke about the arrival of the Framework, about how the people came together and fought the monsters, and how she emerged as one of the ten thousand. Then, the arrival to the Infinite Realm, the early struggle, the losses that the First Iteration suffered as they fought against the monsters. And then the arrival of the second, of her finding love, and having children.

Ryun interrupted her then. “You do not wish to see them again? In the afterlife?” He didn’t ask with the intention of making her feel guilty, he was truly curious.

“They are dead, a true death,” she said. “I had five children, all of them died in fire on the day of the Red Dawn. Their souls burned to nothing as they followed a madman to war.”

She raised her eyes to the sky and gazed at the moon for a while. “I never had any children after that, I couldn’t go through that again. I lived, I survived, I fought. I had friends and enemies, and I had subjects. But now... I cannot take it anymore, this endless existence, just the thought of it is unbearable.”

“All things have an end Ullia, even those who had went to the afterlife will meet it in time,” Ryun told her.

She turned around, meeting his eyes. “You really think that?”

“I know that,” Ryun said, and he felt something inside of him build up again, slowly.

“Perhaps,” Ullia said.

He saw her wince, and he looked at her. He could see the poison in her body, attacking her soul.

“It started to hurt,” Ryun said.

“Yes,” she said, eyeing the flask in her hand.

“Will that help with the pain?” he asked.

“No, but it will make it quicker,” Ullia answered.

Ryun grimaced. He believed that everyone was free to make their own choices, to do what they wanted with their life. But that also meant living or

in this case suffering the consequences. Still, he found himself wishing to offer her an alternative.

“I could make it easier for you,” Ryun said.

Ullia raised her eyebrows. “How?”

As a response Ryun turned on his perk. Red mist spilled out of him and surrounded them. Ullia blinked and then he felt her surprise as she probably read the debuff.

“Well, that is... interesting,” she said.

Ryun shut his perk off and then spoke. “How about a deal? You finish your story, tell me about your life, and in return I will grant you a quick and final end?”

Ullia looked at him for a moment, and then nodded her head.

With their bargain struck, she continued her story, telling him of her life. Of her successes and her losses, of the things she was proud of and the things she was ashamed of. A story about a life.

By the time she came to the end, he could see that the poison was making the pain worse.

“It was a party that made me finally make this decision. I’ve had the poison for almost a century, but it never seemed like a good time. And then, I went to a party and I realized that I didn’t care for anything that those around me cared about. I was only pretending. I made my peace, I gave out all that I had to those I thought were worthy. And I came here, alone with nothing but the clothes on my back.”

She was looking over the lake again, the moonlight making the surface of it glitter in the dark.

“Thank you for sharing that with me,” Ryun said after a moment.

“It is time, I think,” Ullia said and stood up.

Ryun looked at her for a long moment and then followed after her. She entered the lake up to her ankles, then pushed her hand through the water. She was smiling as she turned toward him, then she raised an eyebrow.

“You going to keep your side of the bargain?” Ullia asked.

“My word is my bond,” Ryun said slowly. He was... sad. Sad about this stranger whose life he now knew about. And yet, it was as it should be. All things had an end, some ended sooner rather than later.



He stepped closer and embraced her. She stiffened for a moment, but then she returned the embrace.

Ryun activated the **Eternal Hunter: Reaper** and red mist surrounded them, her stats flowing into him. He used his skill and split his mind. One side pulled Qi out of his core, activated his mantle and pushed all of his boosts into wisdom even as he was building up a second technique, and the other side pulled even more Qi, preparing a perk.

When he was finally ready, he paused, wondering if he should say something else.

“Are you ready?” Ryun asked.

“Yes,” she whispered. “Thank you.”

He pulled her closer and then focused.

His **Void Aura** manifested around them, narrowed to just his immediate circle but with its intensity pushed to the maximum, devouring more than half of his Qi. In the same instant his fruit technique billowed out of him.

**{Staggered End}** exploded out of his body, annihilating Ullia in an instant. The water and the ground around him disappeared, as the void devoured everything. Two blasts followed the second obliterating anything that survived.

Ryun lowered the effects of gravity on himself and floated downward slowly. He shaped a step and landed on it, standing with both feet on it and looking around. He turned off his perks, as the water from the lake rushed back into the crater that he had created, filling it up slowly.

Something fluttered in front of his eyes and he frowned, then reached up with his fingers and touched his cheek. He pulled it away only to see the tears on his fingertips turn to void-mist.

“Huh,” Ryun closed his eyes.

This was... a Final End. An end that came by choice, not imposed by someone else, an end that came at a time when it was meant to. When the person whose life it was wanted it to come. A part of him that still held the echo of the Eternal Hunter was pleased. He had listened to the story of her life and learned her worth. The final word of her life had been written, and the book weighed.

And then, it came to him, almost as if it had always been there. An ideal was what was deep inside, but it was also what a person themselves decided it was to be. He was not a monster that wanted total destruction, the Path of the Final End was not a path that destroyed, it was the path that waited for the Final End. He was not someone who would seek to end things, but he would be there at their end. To witness it, to know it. His purpose in life was to live, to do what he wanted how he wanted. To survive until the Final End came, and see it happen, to witness it.

He reached down inside, feeling the pieces clicking into place.

***My word, is my bond.*** — *I do not break my word.*

***My power, is my right.*** — *I earn what I take.*

***My word grants me a path.*** — *I thread my own path.*

***My power grants me a purpose.*** — *I do not bow to those in my way.*

***All things have an end.*** — *Nothing lasts forever.*

***All things will return to oblivion.*** — *Reality is all, and it is nothing.*

***The End is the beginning.*** — *From oblivion will come something new.*

***I am the last witness.*** — *Through stories, I see worth.*

***I am the Witness of Journey's End.***

Ryun opened his eyes as he felt a notification ping in the corner of his eye, but he didn't pull it up just yet. He felt as if everything had clicked into place for him, as if he had learned the truth of who he was supposed to be. To witness the Final End, that was an ideal worth striving for. To live and survive until this universe came to its end? It was... everything.

He sighed, feeling incredibly tired, but he pulled his notification to his eyes.

The Witness of Journey's End (Unique)	Reach at least a combined power level	+400 to all stats, 5% to all stats, Conclusion Dominance,
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	of nine tiers. And embody an ideal.	100 000 Greater Essence
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An ideal. He had managed to achieve it. It was a title, a perk, a power. And yet, it was so much more than that. For the first time since... perhaps ever, he felt like he knew where he was going.

And all of it was thanks to a life that had met its Final End. All thanks to Ullia Dar Ishi, whose name he would never forget.