Crusade 2.5

It’s a few hours before sunrise near Rowan’s home, Aolani and a pair of miqote men inspect the area leading to the front yard of the beach house.

“As much as I love answering your requests on a moments notice, would you mind telling us what we’re actually looking for?” the smaller of the two men asks, he is an elderly man with swirls of gray and magenta in his hair. He surveys the steps, examining the stampede of footprints leading to the gate. A small insignia is cut into the center of each print, a cluster of three armaments over a shield. The larger of the two men looms over the old man’s shoulder and grunts when he realizes neither of them are familiar with the symbol. They look back to Aolani, who is scooping the blood stained sand into a bag, walking back towards them.

“I don’t know what I’m looking for yet, gramps.” she says, venturing into the yard. She notices a number of cigar remains and a broken smoke pipe along the fence leading to the front door of the house. After smelling the contents of the pipe, she hands it to the larger miqote man, who brings it up to his nose and immediately winces.

“What’s wrong with it?”

“It’s t-too strong!” he violently coughs before stumbling to the bath on the side of the house and throwing water on his face.

“Is it not just mistletoe?”

“It’s so… concentrated.” he groans, handing the pipe to the old man who inhales it deeply.

“I don’t smell any earth in these leaves, they must’ve grown it in a lab or tampered with it somehow.” The old man mutters, lighting the pipe and beginning to smoke its contents.

Aolani ventures back to the gate and stumbles upon a small oil-slicked blade with the same green fluid dripping from the tip of the blade down to the hilt. She licks the liquid from the handle and frowns, tossing the blade to the side.

“It’s just more ether potion… What are we missing?” she gripes.

“Nothing…” the old man scoffs, “the voidsent said the ether potion was too pure, our ingredients here are unnaturally rich. Only other question we can answer is if you know what this symbol represents?”

She looked at the footprints leading to the front door, then up to the stars.

“These aren’t swords, they’re spears… this is a mark for Halone?…”

“Meaning the mistletoe is probably Dravanian.”

“So that only cuts the suspects down to the numerous Halone worshippers across all of Ishgard... very specific.” the larger miqote sighs, rejoining them.

Aolani gathers their findings and throws them all into her bag while the two miqote cover the footprints in the yard. The larger miqote and Aolani stop in their tracks when a small yawn sounds before the light creaking of the front door.

A pale woman with silvery hair stands in the doorway, her skin glows with an ethereal sheen in the moonlight. She is holding a baby with red striped hair similar to Rowan’s, but skin resembling hers, all cradled in crimson-tinted ivory scales. The older man glances at the woman in the door and continues cleaning the evidence in the yard.

“G-Gabbie! I mean— I’d say the early bird gets the worm, but there’s no worms up this early…” Aolani stammers, discreetly closing her bag and slinging it over her shoulder, “did little Mina wake you?”

“No, I just felt like there was a cutie snooping in my yard…“ Gabbie looked down around the yard ignoring Aolani and the larger guest for a moment to examine the older man, who is still paying her no mind, “it’s good to see you again too… old man.”

“Cute kid.” the old man grumbles, finishing his cleaning. He looks to the larger miqote, “We’re done here, we should get back home.”

The larger miqote nods in agreement and playfully ruffles Aolani’s hair, before the duo stumble from the yard, leaving the sisters alone.

“Did you two get into it or something?” Aolani asks, watching the old man being mocked by his partner as they left.

“I gave him a piece of my mind after realizing he was to blame for you performing a blood ritual on yourself…” she frowned, recalling a painful memory. “What’s in the bag?”

“Stuff for an ether potion.” Aolani shrugs, fumbling around in her bag.

“Rowan comes home in the middle of the night and is soundly asleep…at night, and then my sister arrives with two strange guests a few hours later… for ingredients? Pretty roundabout logic for something so easy for you…” Gabbie grows closer, “is there something you’re not telling me?”

Aolani places a hand upon Mina’s head, gently stroking her hair until the child sleepily grabs her hand and brings it to her face. The baby sniffs Aolani’s fingers curiously, and then tries to bite into her aunt with her budding fangs. She quickly tires herself out before fading back to sleep, and the sisters tenderly smile at each other. Aolani’s expression dulls, she tightens her belongings around her shoulder, and shuffles outside of the gate.

“Just tell Rowan to come find me when she wakes up. I don’t wanna keep you up and risk waking up the other little ones…”

Gabriella nods, smiling at her sister until she departs. She looks down at Mina’s face, noting a faint scent of mistletoe before heading back inside.

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