**The Heart of a Hybrid**

**It had been a few days since the last wave and the defeat of General Akuji. The Heroes had been given their royal stipend and had a celebration party for their efforts. Gram and his party were also invited as they played a large role during the wave, thus King Alvin felt they deserved a reward for braving the dangers and protecting the people. Things were, at the moment, quiet.**

**Celtic and his party were at their usual spot in the city, by the fountain in the center of the capital. Celtic was donning his recently repaired and upgraded armor, which now had a fresh look to it due to the new materials added into it. While the clothes underneath it were the same, the breastplate was now diamond-shaped and was a darker shade of silver, almost a similar shade to the Shroud, with a large, transparent diamond-cut gem in the center of it, sleek platinum-colored shoulder plates with a black ring, armored platinum-colored thighs with gold trimming, black boots with armored toes and heels, and a black fingerless gauntlet with platinum trim on his left arm.**

**Skye observed the new outfit, “I gotta say, Danial does good work. This new Chaos Magic Armor certainly looks good on you. And it’s pretty high quality due to you giving him chunks of Platinum and Dark Matter Ore and a Clear Gem. Plus, he managed to upgrade the auto-repair function, calling it his best work, and I can believe it. This armor looks like it can block even the fiercest of attacks. Combined with your absurd defenses, you’re pretty much untouchable.”**

**Celtic replied, “Let’s hope so, as we still have juggernaut opponents out there like Sylph. And considering that the Legendary Stooges failed to do any sort of meaningful work in the last wave, I’m getting awfully tired of our team needing to carry them all the time. You’d think that, after this many failures, they’d put two and two together and actually *try* to improve and become actual Heroes instead of embarrassments to their Gear. But no, they continue to think that Levels and powerful techniques are all they need instead of training and investing themselves in this world’s nature. I’d bet the past Sword, Spear, Axe, and Bow Heroes are turning in their graves in shame that their ‘successors’ are so terrible and tarnishing their legacy.”**

**Zuzu, who was lazily floating above them, replied, “Considering I’ve been alive long enough to actually *see* the previous generation of Legendary Heroes, I can wholeheartedly agree with you. They truly lived up to their titles as Heroes, taking each and every threat seriously, taking the time to learn and decode this world’s inner workings, and banding together in times of crisis like a well-oiled machine. The current generation, barring you, are absolute disgraces. The fact that you five actually are rather antagonistic to each other is also unusual, as past Legendary Heroes have gotten along swimmingly, or at least that’s what I’ve heard. I know at least the previous generation got along pretty easily from my experience, only really bickering when discussing the best method to dealing with war criminals, and that was very rare. Really, only you, Celtic, have lived up to your title in every shape and form. The others haven’t come close to that and haven’t done one thing right since coming here. It’s no wonder other kingdoms want nothing to do with those loose cannons and prefer to request you for help, as you’re the only one who hasn’t caused a catastrophe since your summoning.”**

**Leon nodded, “Yeah, you can say that again, Zuzu. I always knew the Church of the Four Stars’ teachings were wrong to demonize the Shroud and Celtic certainly proved why the Shroud is just as important as the other Heroes. The Shroud may be our only hope right now, as the other four are nothing more than walking disaster areas. I just hope they get their act together soon before they cause a massive disaster of epic proportions.”**

**Suddenly, a male Shadow Sentinel appeared, startling everyone.**

**“My apologies for my sudden arrival, sire,” he said. “But there is a problem that needs tending to.”**

**Celtic gave a heavy sigh, “What is it this time? It better not be another blunder by the Legendary Stooges.”**

**The Shadow Sentinel shook his head, “Fortunately, that is not the case. A village near the Delgunner/Shadoria border was recently attacked by a mysterious enemy. While there were no casualties, the village took a beating before the mysterious enemy snatched an artifact from the shrine in the center of the village. We’ve managed to track down where the enemy has hidden themselves so I can take you directly there. Your mission is simple: retrieve the artifact from the mysterious attacker and return it to the village.”**

**The redhead stood up, “Very well, then. We’d better get going before the enemy makes off with the artifact. Team, we’re moving out.”**

**Everyone nodded, collected all their stuff and stood in front of the Shadow Sentinel. Celtic gave him the signal, making the demonic ninja nod.**

**“Shadow Warp!”**

**They all vanished in black portals before reappearing in an isolated location. There was a cave nearby and a lot of trees and grassy areas.**

**Rupert stated, “Let me guess. Our enemy is in that cave, correct?”**

**The Shadow Sentinel nodded, “Correct. Now you…” but was cut off as they heard something coming from the cave.**

**A familiar voice floated out of the cave, “Well, well, well, looks like my little gambit worked. I knew causing a ruckus and stealing a useless item would draw out the Shroud Hero. Just what I’d expect from a true hero.”**

**Everyone’s jaws dropped when the voice revealed itself to be Sylph. In her left claw was the artifact, which was a stone statue. She then carelessly tossed it at the Shadow Sentinel, who caught it.**

**“There, you can take back that item, as I don’t need it anymore,” Sylph stated. “It served its purpose, which was to lure the Shroud Hero out into an isolated location. Now… I can finally rectify my mistake from 20 years ago. Hmm?” She then noticed Zuzu, “Zuzu? You’re now part of the Shroud Hero’s party? Wait… considering you had been spying on me and Master Infinator… Don’t tell me you’ve relayed valuable information to Shroud Hero?!”**

**Zuzu nodded, her eyes narrowing, “Yeah, I did exactly that. Letting me live was a big mistake, as I learned a lot while spying on you in my attempt to isolate you. I’ve since relayed it to not just Celtic, but also the higher-ups like King Duskbane and King Alvin. Now we’re aware of what your main goal is: to tear open another gateway to the Demon Realm in places where the dimensional walls between Zakota and the Demon Realm are weak. That way you can speed up Infinator’s revival and gather much more powerful allies and resources for your army. Looks like your attempt to crush my pride by sparing me after my defeat ended up backfiring. Not your usual standards, Sylph.”**

**The Succulite gained a snarl, “Then I’ll rectify that mistake today as well. And just so you know… I’m not alone.”**

**She snapped her fingers, causing several minions of different species to appear.**

**“Today I will erase all of you from the equation, leaving four increasingly lackluster ‘Heroes’ for my Master to wipe out with ease. The world is too dependent on you, Shroud Hero, so by eliminating you I’ll have robbed the world of its most valuable player. Prepare to die!”**

**As she was talking the Shadow Sentinel vanished, clearly going to report to King Duskbane about Sylph’s gambit. Sylph didn’t care as she snapped her fingers, siccing the various minions on Celtic’s party. Sylph then tried to charge at Celtic only to be forced into the air by Zuzu.**

**Zuzu stated, “Leave Sylph to me, Celtic! You deal with her pets!”**

**Celtic nodded and he and the rest of the party began attacking the various enemies. Zuzu and Sylph glared at each other hatefully.**

**“Fine, I’ll kill you first,” Sylph stated.**

**“Not if I tear you apart first!” Zuzu countered.**

**The two Mid-Tier demonesses charged at each other and began brawling in the air. To Sylph’s surprise, Zuzu was far more powerful and smarter than the last time they fought, as the Succuryn was clearly not solely using brute force like before. As the two of them lashed out at each other in their airborne brawl, Celtic and his party were cutting down the various enemies they were facing.**

**“We have to deal with these minions fast!” Tyroe stated as his coils crushed another one. “That way Sylph can’t get the drop on us!”**

**Celtic nodded, “Agreed, Tyroe! These lesser foes could very easily distract us from Sylph herself. At least Zuzu has her attention for now, so that gives us some breathing room. But we need to kill these minions before Sylph redirects her attention to us.”**

**Viola sliced one in half with her scythe, stating, “Then let’s work fast and keep Sylph from getting an opening! Hopefully Zuzu can keep her occupied long enough for us to finish off these grunts.”**

**As the party continued to fight off the lesser enemies, Zuzu and Sylph were still fighting an intense battle in the air. To Sylph’s horror, Zuzu was proving to be a much more competent opponent this time around, as her attacks were actually forcing the Succulite on the defensive.**

**“I-Impossible!” she sputtered mentally. “That blasted Succuryn is actually getting the edge over me?! How?! She’s only at Level 59, which means she underwent a Level Reset, as she was Level 100 last time I saw her, while I’m at Level 350! How is she getting the upper-hand against me!? No! C-Could I actually *lose* this fight!? If I don’t do something quick she’ll overwhelm me!”**

**Zuzu noticed that Sylph was starting to panic, gaining a diabolical grin.**

**“Not so cocky now, huh, Sylph?” she sneered. “I may be a much lower Level than last time we squared off, but I’ve gotten much stronger and better since I joined Celtic’s crew of misfits! I’m more powerful at my current Level then I was at Level 100! And I intend to finally put an end to you, Sylph! You’ll regret not finishing me off last time we tangled! This time you. Will. LOSE!”**

**The thought of losing was clearly something Sylph was terrified at. As she continued to fight back she was desperately trying to find a means of getting out of the fight alive. She also noticed that her minions were almost all dead, leaving her with increasingly less options. Finally, out of sheer panic she abandoned the fight with Zuzu and charged at Skye, much to Celtic’s and Zuzu’s horror. Celtic tried to get in front of them but Sylph was too fast. Before Skye could react the Succulite impaled her through the chest, causing the Light Elf to collapse instantly. Celtic and the rest of his party were frozen in shock, with Celtic noticing that Skye’s stats on his stat vision had vanished after hitting zero. This also had the side-effect of knocking both her Spiria out of her body, something that Sylph noticed.**

**“S-Spiria!?” she sputtered. “They’ve returned?! Forget that for now, I’m out of here!”**

**She quickly fled the scene, leaving everyone behind as they all looked at Skye’s dead body in shock and horror. Celtic stumbled over to her side, falling to his knees and gently picked her up.**

**“Skye…?” he said in a weak voice. “Skye!? Skye! Please, no! NO!!!”**

**Just then King Duskbane and his army appeared only to be frozen in shock at the sight.**

**“No!” King Duskbane roared in despair. “Too late again!? Just like what happened with Noir and Gardenia! Why am I always too late!?”**

**Tears were pouring out of the party’s eyes at the loss of Skye, clearly devastated by it. Skye’s Spiria were nudging her body, trying to get a response, but they got nothing out of the Light Elf. Celtic gently cradled her body, clearly the most devastated, his eyes closed tightly as his hot tears dripped onto her body. Suddenly, Duskbane’s eyes widened, realizing something.**

**“Avalar…” he said. “There is a way to save her.”**

**Celtic’s eyes snapped open as he looked at Duskbane, “There is?! How! Tell me!”**

**Viola turned to Duskbane, “But, Your Majesty, revival magic doesn’t exist.”**

**King Duskbane stated, “It does if you’re a demon. Granted, it’s a more costly version, but if we act fast we can bring Skye back to the way she was before Sylph killed her. Avalar, you will have to make a large personal sacrifice to bring her back, but it will revive her.”**

**Celtic’s eyes showed hope, “Please, tell me! I’ll do anything! Tell me what I have to do!”**

**“Very well. This is what you have to do. You need to state a certain incantation, like how most Demon magic is executed, select one of your hearts, and magically transplant it into her. It will have long-term effects on you, such as, at the very least, lost years off your life expectancy, but it will save her from the abyss of death. I suggest picking one of your lesser hearts, like the ones in your lower abdomen, for this ritual, since it’ll cost you the least. If you are ready I can tell you the incantation.”**

**Celtic nodded, “Yes, tell me. I can’t lose her.”**

**King Duskbane smiled, “Very well. The incantation is as followed: ‘Spirits of the Demon Realm I call upon thee. I offer one of my hearts to make a lost soul whole. To bring you back from the void and restore you to your former glory.’ That is what you need to say.”**

**Celtic nodded, placed his hands near his lower right side and stated, *“Spirits of the Demon Realm I call upon thee. I offer one of my hearts to make a lost soul whole. To bring you back from the void and restore you to your former glory.”***

**This caused Celtic’s body to glow, followed by the glow congregating near where his hands were. This was followed by a sphere of light emerging from his body. Inside everyone could hear a beating heart. Celtic moved the sphere and pushed it into Skye’s chest. Her body absorbed the sphere of light, followed by her body pulsating and a heavy heartbeat being heard. The wound on her chest also closed, the blood she spilt vanishing, and her body started to glow. When the light subsided everyone noticed that Skye was breathing again. Her stats reappeared on Celtic’s stat vision, making his eyes widen in joy. Slowly, Skye began to move before weakly opening her eyes.**

**“C-Cel?” she asked weakly. “Everyone? Is… Is that you?”**

**Celtic replied warmly, “Yes, Skye, it’s us. You’ve come back to us.”**

**It took a moment for Skye to process this before her eyes widened, “Wait! I was killed! How am I still alive?!”**

**Leon replied warmly, “Celtic made quite the sacrifice for you. He used Demon magic to transplant one of his own hearts into you to revive you. Now you have one of Celtic’s hearts beating inside of your chest, which brought you back from the abyss of death.”**

**It took another moment for Skye to process this before she looked at Celtic, shocked, “Y-You mean you magically transplanted one of your hearts into me?! Cel… I… If I ever needed a reason to love you, this would be it. Thank you. Thank you so much. I’m forever in your debt.”**

**The redhead smiled, “No, Skye, I’m just repaying the favor. If I had never met you, I would’ve run from this world, wishing it would burn and not care about doing my job. You became the hope and light that I desperately needed after years of hatred, anger, and misery. If you hadn’t come into my life I would’ve never become the person I am now. I wouldn’t have met Rupert, Viola, Tyroe, Leon, and Zuzu, all of whom gave me a reason to fight. So, I’m just repaying you for everything, Skye.”**

**Skye’s eyes started to gain water, “Oh, Celtic…”**

**King Duskbane then stated, “As much as I hate to interrupt this wondrous scenario, I have to inform you that both Avalar and Lady Skye will have to go to Shadoria for treatment to ensure that both of you will be okay. Transplanting a demon’s heart into another being, especially if said being isn’t another demon, can have a variety of effects on both people, so you need to go to Shadoria for treatment.”**

**Celtic nodded, “We understand.” He then turned to Zuzu, “Zuzu, I know that you’re afraid of Shadokor, as we are your natural predators, so if you want…” but was cut off.**

**Zuzu shook her head, “No. I’m coming along. I’m not backing out now. I don’t care if I’m going into the center of my natural predators’ kingdom, I’m going to see this through to the end. I’m one of you now, and you all have become the family I never had, so I’m not bailing on you now. It won’t be easy, but I intend to see this through to the end, as both of you need the support. So, I’m coming along no matter what.”**

**Everyone smiled at Zuzu’s resolve.**

**“You’re a true friend, Zuzu,” Rupert stated.**

**“And a true member of this party,” Tyroe added.**

**“We’re all very grateful for what you’re willing to do, Zuzu,” Viola smiled warmly.**

**Celtic then scooped up Skye, stating, “Thank you, Zuzu. This means a lot. Now, someone will have to carry Skye’s Spiria for now, as they can’t fuse with her right now for some reason.”**

**Leon scooped both Spiria up, “I’ve got you covered, Cel.”**

**King Duskbane stated, “The reason why the Spiria can’t fuse with Lady Skye right now is because her body, soul, and magical energies have been desynchronized due to her death. She needs to resynchronize before they can fuse with her again, which shouldn’t take more than a day or so. But, for now, let’s get all of you to Shadoria so Avalar and Lady Skye can get treated. I’ll send one of my men to Delgunner to let them know of what happened. And don’t worry about the artifact, as the Shadow Sentinel who reported this ordeal to me returned it afterward. Now, let’s us leave and get you two in for treatment. Shadow Warp!”**

**King Duskbane, the Shadokor, Celtic, and his party all vanished in black portals, heading for Shadoria. A few hours later everyone was gathered in the castle, which was impressive, if rather frightening-looking, befitting of a demonic race. Celtic was in a room with Skye and her two Spiria. They had finished their treatment and Skye was resting in a bed, awaiting the results. The rest of the party had been escorted to guest rooms to rest while they waited for the news. Shortly afterward a knock was heard at the door.**

**“Enter,” Celtic said.**

**King Duskbane and what looked like a doctor entered the room. Skye opened her eyes so she could hear what the results were.**

**The doctor stated, “Okay, I have the results of your treatment and tests. We’ll start with Lady Skye. For starters, the transplant was a success. However, there appears to be some interesting side-effects of the transplant. Because you now have a Dark-attributed demon’s heart in you, you’ve now gained access to the Dark element, something that Light Elves don’t have access to. This means you can expand your magical options by being able to learn moves like Antimatter Blast and Dark Strike. It also means you’ve become a pseudo Chaos breed, so you can gain access to other elements that Chaos breeds can use, like Illusion magic. Your life expectancy also increased. Normally, Light Elves live for about 500 years, give or take, but because you have a demon’s heart in you you’ve gained an extra 50 years, meaning you’ll live for roughly 550 years. And, as King Duskbane noticed, you have been freed from your slave crest, thus you are no longer under the slave status.”**

**Skye smiled, “I can live with that. At least Celtic can finally stop feeling guilty about being a slave owner, though he is still the master of my heart. In this case quite literally. And I can now access elements I didn’t have before like Dark and Illusion? That’s pretty cool. I’m gonna love expanding my options with those new toys. And I’ll live longer because of Celtic’s heart is really sweet. That means I can spend more time with my handsome hybrid hubby.”**

**“I’m not handsome,” Celtic stated firmly. “And we’re not married, so I’m not your hubby… yet.”**

**Skye giggled, “True, but it’ll happen eventually.”**

**The doctor then said, “Moving on. Prince Avalar’s test results show that, unfortunately, due to high levels of stress, he lost 25 years off his life expectancy. Normally, he’d only lose about 10, but because of his stress levels being through the roof he lost much more. Fortunately, that’s the only long-term cost of the transplant, so he won’t have any other long-term problems. But I highly suggest you get those stress levels down for your own benefit, though I’m aware *why* your stress levels are as high as they are. Those idiot ‘Heroes’ sure don’t make things easy for you. But you need to find ways to relax more and reduce your stress, as it’ll take a toll on you as you get older.”**

**Skye looked worried, “Cel lost a quarter of a century on his lifespan? How long would he live normally?”**

**“Given he’s half Shadokor, his normal expected lifespan would be about 600 years, give or take, so at least losing 25 years isn’t a huge amount,” King Duskbane stated. “And it’ll allow both of you to remain together much longer, as Avalar would’ve outlived you by a good 100 years under normal circumstances, Lady Skye. And I don’t think he could’ve handled 100 years without you.”**

**Celtic gained a blush, “Yeah… well… you’d be right about that. At least me losing some years and Skye gaining some means I won’t grossly outlive her. It puts our life spans closer to each other, so I can live with a 25 year loss if it means Skye and I can stay together longer. But I knew those four brainless lemmings would shorten my lifespan in some form or another. At this rate they’ll be the death of me. Gives me one more reason to hate Ryan, Lucas, Eric, and Jerry.”**

**The doctor then said, “Either way, those are the results of your tests. You’ll have to remain here for a day or two to ensure Lady Skye’s system resynchronizes, so I suggest you take this time to rest and relax for a bit. I’ll pass on the news to your party members so they’ll know what to expect. If you’ll excuse me.”**

**The doctor bowed and left the room, leaving Celtic, Skye, and King Duskbane alone.**

**The demon king gave a relieved sigh, “I’m so relieved that both of you came out of that ritual with only minimal issues. While the ritual has a high success rate, there are often other negative side-effects that can occur between species through the transplant. But, fortunately, the worst of it was Avalar losing more years on his lifespan than normal, which is something I can live with. And it appears you’re fine with it, too, Avalar. That’s a relief. Now, since you’ll be staying here in the castle for a bit, I’ve arranged for some special treatment so both of you can get some much needed rest. I’ve also informed the chefs in the kitchen to prepare normal foods for you and your party.”**

**Celtic gave him a leery look, “I assume ‘normal’ means things like steak, potatoes, fruit, eggs, and other food that regular people eat, right?”**

**King Duskbane chuckled, “Yes, you don’t have to worry about that, Avalar, as that’s what you’ll be getting. You should really embrace your Shadokor heritage, though, as you’d be surprised what you can gain from it.”**

**The redhead replied dryly, “I’ll embrace what I want from it. At least I don’t have to worry about being fed something like slug and centipede gumbo or whatnot while I’m here.”**

**“Hey, you’d be surprised how good that tastes, Avalar, especially since our chefs do an excellent job at it.”**

**Both Celtic and Skye gained incredulous looks before sticking out their tongues in disgust.**

**“No thank you!” both stated.**

**“Have it your way,” King Duskbane chuckled. “More for me and my family, then. Now, I’ll leave you in peace. I’ll check up on you two in a little while. Your dinner will be brought to you here so you can stay by Lady Skye’s side. Until then.”**

**With a final bow King Duskbane left the room. Celtic and Skye exchanged odd looks.**

**“I think I’ll pass on the slug and centipede gumbo,” the Light Elf said.**

**“Same here,” Celtic replied. “I’ll embrace certain parts of my demon heritage, but I’ll definitely omit demon eating habits and tastes. Give me something like pancakes, pizza, burgers, smoothies, and lobster any day compared to demon meat and slug and centipede gumbo. Now, I suggest you lay down and rest for a bit, Skye, as you did have a rough ride.”**

**Skye sat up and embraced Celtic, kissing him on the cheek, “Thank you, Celtic. I am proud to be the dagger to your cloak. You did so much for me ever since you rescued me from the slave trade. I’m just glad I can do anything for you in return. You gave me the ultimate gift today and I am forever grateful. I know everything will work out in the end.”**

**Celtic smiled as he gently pushed her back down onto the bed. Her two Spiria nuzzled against her, happy to see her okay, making the Light Elf smile and gently stroke them. She then drifted off to sleep with Celtic gently holding her hand.**

**A few days had passed and it had become common knowledge in Delgunner that Sylph had ambushed Celtic and his party, resulting in Skye’s temporary death. However, some of the information got lost in the gossip, especially when it got to Wench’s ears. The evil Light Elf was celebrating, much to her family’s and party’s disgust.**

**“Yahoo!” Wench cheered. “Skye is dead! At last my annoying younger sister is gone for good! I never have to see her again!”**

**Sludge snarled, “You watch your mouth, Wench! Skye is still our family, and no one should celebrate someone’s death! Your mother would be ashamed of you!”**

**Wimp added, “Yeah, father’s right! You disgust us, Wench! As much as I feared Skye, I still respected her strength and talent! You’re nothing compared to her!”**

**This remark angered Wench, “What was that little brother? Maybe I should send you to join her!”**

**Suddenly, a familiar voice stated, “Looks like you didn’t get the whole message, Wench.”**

**Wench’s eyes widened in horror, her ears drooping, “Oh, please tell me that’s not who I think it is.” She turned to see Skye and the rest of her party, alive and well, much to her horror, “S-S-Skye!? You’re supposed to be dead! Are you a zombie!?”**

**Skye cracked her knuckles threateningly, “I was dead, but Celtic saved me from the abyss and gave me a new lease on life. Now, I’m back and I’m better than ever. It’ll take much more than Sylph to get rid of a prize like me, as Celtic proved.”**

**Lucas looked stunned, “B-But if you’ve been alive this whole time, where have you been?”**

**Rupert replied, “We had to go to Shadoria so Skye and Celtic could get medical treatment after the ritual that Celtic performed on Skye. It was to ensure that both came out of it with minimal issues. That’s why we’ve been gone for a few days, as Skye needed time to recover and resynchronize. But, like she said, she’s not only back in action but even stronger than before.”**

**Wench gained a horrified expression, “Y-You were revived?! That’s impossible! This has to be a dream!”**

**Wimp gained a dark smirk and pinched Wench on the side, making her yelp.**

**“What was that for, you brat?!” she spat.**

**Wimp replied smoothly, “I was helping you realize that this is not a dream. If it was, that pinch would’ve woken you up, but since nothing has changed, then this situation is very much real.”**

**Wench’s eyes widened in horror at the realization. She quickly tried to hide behind Lucas.**

**“Protect me, Lucas!” she cried.**

**To her shock and horror, Lucas shoved her back, his eyes glaring hatefully at her.**

**“Not this time, Wench,” he growled. “No one should celebrate someone’s death the way you did. No, I’m allowing Skye free reign on this one, as you have it coming.”**

**Wench’s eyes widened even more, her ears drooping further, while Skye gained a diabolical look on her face. Wench quickly bolted from the spot with Skye right on her heels. She ducked into an alleyway, Skye following, and before long they could all hear the solid thrashing that Skye was giving Wench. Wench wailed in pain and pleaded for mercy but Skye was not having any of it.**

**Sludge turned to his son, “You’d better get some healers over here, son, as Wench will need them.”**

**Wimp nodded, “Right, father, I’ll be right back.”**

**As Wimp ran off to fetch some healers, Sludge slowly walked over to Celtic. The redhead noticed this unusual amount of caution from the disgraced Light Elf royal.**

**“What do you want, Sludge?” he asked.**

**“I need to know…” the Light Elf said. “How did you save Skye from the abyss of death? Revival magic doesn’t exist, so, how?”**

**“It does if you’re a demon. I used Demon magic to transplant one of my seven hearts into Skye to bring her back from the void. The ritual was a success and Skye gained a lot of benefits out of it. I lost 25 years off my life expectancy in return, but since I was going to live for about 600 years anyway I’m fine with it. Being part demon has advantages. While I’ll never regain that heart despite the fact that demons have powerful regeneration abilities, it was worth it to save Skye.”**

**Sludge’s eyes went wide, “Y-You mean you magically transplanted one of your demon hearts into Skye to bring her back to life!? I didn’t know demons could do that. And Skye gained a number of benefits from the transplant? I… I don’t know what to say. So, Skye will have new benefits from your heart that now beats in her chest? I’m… I’m amazed.”**

**Viola stated matter-of-factly, “You can learn a lot about another species when you put aside something petty like racism and actually accept said species. We all have our advantages and disadvantages, and we all can contribute something. Racism tends to get in the way of those benefits. I suggest you try it sometime, as it may make all the difference.”**

**While Sludge didn’t like what Viola had said he said nothing in response, contemplating the situation.**

**Celtic then said, “I also have something to say that might interest you, Sludge. I plan to bring former Queen Jade back alive.”**

**This got Sludge’s attention, “What?! Y-You plan to bring my wife back alive!? How?”**

**“I have a theory I’ve been wanting to test, something that may be the key to bringing Jade back and purified from the trans-mutation. Unfortunately, I’ve been unable to test it out, as I haven’t run into another subject that I can test it on. One that’s also been affected by the trans-mutation process. So, I may have to test the theory on Jade herself when the time comes for us to face her. I plan to try to bring her back for Skye’s sake, since it seems that Skye bears the least animosity toward her mother. However, I can’t promise that I will be successful in my theory, thus possibly necessitating Jade getting euthanized to end her suffering. But I want to try to bring her back alive and purified from the trans-mutations. Don’t get your hopes up, as I don’t have enough evidence that my theory could work, but if it does I’ll bring her back alive.”**

**Sludge’s eyes widened in surprise, “Y-You actually will try to save Jade? You mean it?”**

**“Keyword is ‘try’, Sludge, as I don’t have enough proof that my theory will work. But if I can pull it off, which would require the Shroud’s power and unique nature, then you’ll be reunited with your wife. So, I suggest you stop trying to pick a fight with me and hold your tongue if you want to see your beloved wife alive. Otherwise I may just forgo the theory and end Jade myself.”**

**This statement made Sludge grit his teeth in annoyance but he remained silent, thinking about the possibility of his wife returning alive. It wasn’t long before the beating sounds of Skye’s thrashing had ended. Skye walked out of the alley, dusting her hands off, a smug grin on her face. She popped her neck, rotated her shoulders, and gave a shiver of pleasure.**

**“Ooh, that felt good,” she said. “That’ll teach her to prematurely celebrate my death. And I admit I’m impressed that you, Lucas, allowed it, seeing how you always see her as perfect and always turn a blind eye to her underhanded nature.”**

**Lucas replied nervously, “Yeah, well… this time I couldn’t stomach what she was doing. I have standards, too, you know.”**

**“They must be very small standards,” Zuzu sassed. “Seeing how you never act like a proper hero and tend to allow Wench to get away with her various schemes. As someone who lived long enough to see the previous Spear Hero, you are an epic failure compared to him, as he would never let someone like Wench get away with as much as she did. So, I’m guessing your standards aren’t very high if you allow someone like her to continue her heinous actions. Even a rogue like myself finds her appalling.”**

**Lucas glared at her in response, making her smirk. It wasn’t long before Wimp and the healers arrived. The healers looked in the alley at Wench and flinched.**

**“Woo!” one said. “She’s in pretty bad shape. We’ll have to teleport her to the hospital for treatment, as moving her** **in this state might be a bad idea.”**

**The second one said to Lucas, “Spear Hero, you’ll have to come with me to the hospital so we can treat Wench. She’ll take some work, so you better be on-deck for when she’s ready.”**

**Lucas nodded and with the rest of his party followed the healer back to the hospital, as the first one had already teleported Wench there. Celtic gently cupped Skye’s face, smiling.**

**“As feisty as always, Skye,” he said warmly.**

**“That’s just how I am,” the Light Elf giggled.**

**As this exchange occurred, Sludge was in deep thought.**

**“The Shroud not only spared me, my eldest daughter, and son from execution, but he also revived Skye by giving her one of his own hearts AND plans to rescue my wife? Even after I pegged him with those false charges a while back and all the actions Wench has performed against him? Is… Is the Shroud more benevolent than I thought? Does this mean my entire family may be saved by the Shroud? I don’t know what to think. If holding my tongue around him means I get my wife back then… then maybe it’ll be worth it. And maybe, just maybe… if I ally myself with the Shroud I might get all that I love returned to me. Jade, please hold on a bit longer. Hope may be on the way.”**

**Next Chapter: *Dragons of the Black Fog***