

Prologue

Monica hesitated as she reached for the door handle. She stood feverishly before her husband's office. With a big breath she burst through the door. Her husband looked up from his hologram computer screens and tore his glasses off. His face was washed blue from the light of the screens. He looked up at her with impatience.

"Monica, I'm in the middle of something."

"Chris." She spoke in a grave tone. "I just got off the phone with my father."

Christopher set his glasses down and sighed heavily. Monica sat down on the chaise next to his desk. Christopher turned towards her curiously.

"What did he have to say?"

"He said his men have found a Pyros child." She started. "They've taken her, and now he wants *us* to adopt her."

Christophers eyes widened "Adopt a Pyros?"

"Yes."

Christopher was taken aback, and he paused before speaking.

"What school would we put this girl in? This is an air city. They won't accept her here."

"My father will help us with the arrangements."

"Why us?"

"Because he trusts us. He spared this girl. They could have just killed her, you know."

"Yes, I'm aware." He said casting a stern look at his wife. "I don't like the idea of it. We have a beautiful daughter, my firm is doing well, and this neighborhood is just perfect. There's no reason to jeopardize all that by adopting a rebel child."

Monica searched his eyes. She clasped her hands together in her lap.

"I feel a strong impression that we *need* to take in this girl. You know what will happen to her if we don't."

"Why? You don't even know the girl."

Monica's heart pounded as she pleaded with her husband. She reflected on her father's past dealings.

He would never make such an allowance. He was the one that made the law that the Pyros couldn't have children. He wants their punishment more than any of the other presidents.

Monica's voice dropped, and she reached for Christopher's hands.

"We're the one chance she has... if we don't take her, will her blood be on our hands?"

"Monica!" Christopher's eyes widened. He squeezed her hands. He shook his head and tried to make sense of his thoughts.

He spoke finally "I'm sorry. It's all so sudden, and the idea is just... appalling, don't you think?"

"We could give this girl a better life. Raise her better than those horrible rebels would have."

"At the cost of everything we worked for?" He argued, his tone still soft as he cradled her hands in his.

"We will be taken care of... My father will repay us for this."

"How."

"He wouldn't come to us with this if he didn't think we could do it."

Christopher dropped his head. He held Monica's hands like a lifeline. He asked in a defeated tone.

"What else... Has he asked us?"

"To raise her up and get her in the military."

"Of course. She's a symbol. She's an example. There had to be some reason he was saving this girl! There's no other reason he would spare a daughter of the pyros."

"Chris... Tell me what you feel."

He looked back at his computer and got up, slipping his hands away from hers. He walked over to the curved windows overlooking their neighborhood. The large houses sat on an island suspended over the city. Clouds sifted through the streets and the sun glimmered overhead. Other distant sky islands dotted the skyline. They had a brilliant view of the coast sparkling in the summer sun. Monica came to his side. He spoke softly, looking out at the neighborhood.

"What we have is so *perfect*. We've worked so hard to get here. I don't want to upend it all."

"It won't be perfect for long as the rebels keep poisoning our city. I think we need to do this."

The silence stretched as long as the clouds sifting through the streets. Yellow leaves blew softly on the trees outside their window. The neighborhood was painted by the soft blue of the sky and the warm yellow of the trees. Christopher spoke firmly.

"Tell me about this girl. Who is she?"

"Her name is Sarah Baltizar."

Christopher's mouth hung open. His hands tensed up.

"Baltizar?!"

"Yes."

"You're telling me that your father wants us to adopt the daughter of the leaders of the rebellion?!"

"Yes he—"

"The most wanted rebels in the empire." His voice sharpened as he made his point.

"We can't. There's no way. You must tell your father no."

"Please understand..."

"How are you on board with this? You've never met this little girl, but you know better than anyone the crimes of the Baltizar family. You know their atrocities!"

Monica pursed her lips. She clamped her jaw with the pressure of her fathers request, her own desires, and her husband's feelings. Christopher sensed her tension.

"Your father is not giving you a choice, is he." He replied grudgingly.

"He's the President. He can make an exception for the schools. He will take care of us if our situation suffers."

"He can't change our neighbors' minds..."

"Just think. She's just a baby, what would she know about the world? We could teach her. We could give her a better life in our home." She said softly. "Kendra could have a sister."

“You’re on board with your father, then. You really think people will accept this? A raven haired firebreather with silver haired windmakers? I’m not just thinking about our image here, I do believe it will be extremely difficult for a Pyros living in a Stratos city.”

She folded her arms and pursed her lips, tightening her resolve. “So what if she’s different from us? I think... as crazy as it might sound... I would love to have this little girl.”

“Monica, This is a very difficult thing you are asking of me.”

“I’m not asking for it. The president is.”

Christopher was left without words.

“I can’t let them kill that baby girl. I won’t let her suffer for her parents’ crimes.” She took Christopher’s hand in hers. She squeezed his hand and stated “I won’t let that little girl go. No matter what faction she is. She’s mine. She’s ours, Christopher.”

He looked her deep into her eyes, tearing his gaze away from his picturesque neighborhood.

“I love you very much, Monica. I love our daughter. If you think... that your father will take care of us, then I will do all in my power to take care of you... and this girl.”

“Thank you.” She cried quietly, squeezing his hands. He wrapped her in his arms, holding her head close to his.

They sat down together at Christopher’s desk. Monica pulled out a portfolio of papers. They took out pens and signed the adoption papers. They saw the name *Sarah Adrianna Baltizar* printed on the line above the box where they would write in her new

legal name. In his best handwriting, Christopher wrote the name *Sarah Adrianna Skyrin*.

Then both of them signed the papers. It was set in paper.

Copyright Isabella Walton