



# Sakturia

Festival of Water and Light



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“Verae amici hinan (true friends are a refuge).”

-Royal Seylan Saying

**S**ule paced across her quarters impatiently, a sign of weakness but she couldn't help it. It was Sakturia night, the one day her friend might be able to visit her. Sule hadn't seen her friend Tilva since the woman had disappeared for her ascension and it was an ache on her heart. She stopped to look at the passage doorway again, its dark paneling blended in perfectly with the walls, unless you knew what to look for. Her hopes were dashed, because the doorway did not move.

Sule stopped and looked around her quarters again anxiously. Everything was still laid out perfectly. The wine and goblets, Shatranj board, chairs, and food were all exactly where she had put them. Then the doorway creaked every so slowly, making Sule gasp and turn towards it immediately, breath catching in her throat. There were only two people in all of Kinrai besides herself that knew how to access that passageway. Her brother Armis and her childhood friend Tilva.

The soaking wet hooded form of a woman stood there in the open doorway, water puddling at her feet. The woman raised her hands, which were covered in scar-like tattoos and lowered the hood, their eyes met. They were not eyes that Sule knew, nor was the scarred and tattooed face one that she knew, though she recognized them. Everyone had seen the Queen Mother, at least from a distance. The woman smiled warmly and spoke in a hurried emotional voice. “Alligator feathers.”



Sule gasped and was walking towards her friend before she knew it. There was only one other woman on Innatraea that knew their secret phrase. The eyes and face may not be the ones she knew but the glamour of her friend's ascension had changed those, all Companions knew that. They embraced, both of them pulling the other close in desperation, it had been more than a year. Sule choked as she tried to speak. "Tilva."

They held each other, so tightly it hurt, for what seemed like hours. Sule didn't even notice how wet her dress had gotten, or that time was passing. Finally they pulled away from one another, just far enough for their eyes to meet. They both placed their palms on the sides of the other woman's face and touched their foreheads together. "It is a happiness in my heart to see you again Sule, our letters have been a refuge for me this last year, but not nearly enough."

Sule could feel the new scars and tattoos that lined her friend's face with her hands. "Do they still hurt? There are so many."

Tilva, her friend, and now her queen smiled and closed her eyes. "Receiving them was the greatest pain I have ever felt, but they have long since healed." She sighed and was quiet for a moment, Sule felt her relax more in their embrace. "They told me that no Queen Mother ever receives so many scars. I am apparently a great oddity and most likely have an interesting life ahead of me."

Sule moved one of her hands, placing it onto her friend's heart. "Your pain is my pain. Your heart is my heart." There was nothing else to say, they were together again, even if it was only for a brief time. She stepped back and smiled, before taking her friend's cloak and hanging it on a nearby stand. Then she smiled and nodded respectfully, motioning towards one of the two chairs. "Queen Mother."



Tilva smiled ruefully as Sule removed her cloak and shook the water off, before hanging it up. "Thank you, some of the night's revelers got a little exuberant, though I suppose that is the point of Sakturia, and my disguise." She laughed when Sule spoke, how she had missed her friend's light musical laugh. "There is no need to address me as such in private Sule, we have known each other since our days on the streets as children."

Sule smiled, laughing softly herself. "Public habits are built upon private practices."

Tilva rolled her eyes in an exaggerated fashion as she sat down "Quoting the edicts to me? I am your queen."

Sule smiled mischievously as she sat down in the other chair and poured wine for them both. "Are you my queen? Or my friend? I am feeling a bit confused on the matter now." She handed Tilva one of the now full goblets.

Her friend laughed briefly and took a sip of the wine before replying. "You well and truly caught me with that one." She looked out the open balcony door for a few moments in thought. "Sometimes I wonder if they chose the right one of us to be queen."

Sule took a sip of wine also, giving her friend the moments to think. "They chose well, I am more useful out here as the last year has shown us, and your mastery of tactics has always been superior to mine." Sule set her goblet down and picked up one of her soldiers, considering her first move. "My gift is people, yours is everything else. Come, teach me the truth of my words."

Her friend turned back towards the board and smiled. "How is your brother?"

Sule met her friend's eyes and laughed softly again. "Armis? He is well. You could just ask him yourself."

Her friend placed one of her soldiers and picked up her wine goblet again. "You know I cannot do that, we live different lives now."



"What, do you miss your days of running around naked with him on Sakturia night?"

Her friend coughed. "Yes, that would be a very good look for the people's queen!" Laughing, she put down her goblet to study the board. "That is a marvelous vintage, where did you acquire it?"

"The wine is Thavan, a Prunelle. Not quite a Daphshire, but it suffices." Sule looked at Tilva for a moment while considering her next move. "You could drop the glamour and run with Armis tonight as your old self."

Tilva looked down for a moment and touched her heavily scarred cheek gently as the briefest emotion passed through her eyes. "I cannot, the effect is permanent unfortunately."

Having decided upon her move, Sule released her elephant and nodded empathetically. "I am sorry, I did not know. Is it strange waking up to a different face every morning now? Even I would not have known it was you, if you had not spoken our secret phrase."

"The experience is indeed very strange, though I have mostly gotten used to who I am now." She smiled, some happiness returning to her eyes. "Thank you for still being my friend, I needed at least one person from my old life."

"Our friendship is without question, you are like a sister to me." She watched her friend for a moment and smiled a bit sadly. "Though I still remember those first few days after you disappeared. Armis and I must have scoured all of the city looking for you."

Tilva leaned forward, placing a hand on Sule's and squeezing gently, while touching her heart with the other and meeting her eyes. "I am sorry you both had to go through that. Your pain is my pain."

Sule squeezed her friend's hand back and smiled. "You did not have a choice, there is nothing to apologize for."



Tilva smiled and placed her hand on Sule's heart. "Thank you my friend. Your heart is my heart." Then her gaze grew pensive. "How is Armis, truly? My disappearance must have been so hard on him."

Sule sighed and turned to look out towards her balcony. Tilva's disappearance had indeed been hard on her brother, but there were secrets meant to be kept. She looked her friend on the eyes. "There is something you should know..."

Tilva blinked, obviously surprised. "He knows?"

"He does, though I did not tell him a thing."

Tilva laughed and smiled. "I should not be surprised, Armis has always been a very observant man."

Sule rolled her eyes, but couldn't help laughing. "Indeed he is, one of his more annoying qualities."

"He would have made a good companion."

Sule almost choked on her wine. "That would have been awful, men are not supposed to be that observant. He is also nowhere near pretty enough."

"I thought he was pretty enough."

Style rolled her eyes again. "He is well though, annoying or not. He is my brother and has always been a very resilient man." She smiled knowingly. "I also believe knowing what happened helped him." Then she eyed her friend. "It is your move."

Tilva smiled and leaned forward to look at the board, but then the sound of music and yelling came from outside. "The Sakturia night run!"

Sule smiled and put her wine goblet down. "Come. I left most of the balcony lanterns unlit so no one will see you, and I have water jugs."

Tilva laughed joyously and they both stood up to head towards the balcony. "I have always wanted to throw water on them! I thought being queen would deny me such silly things in life."



They reached the balcony and Sule picked up two ceramic water jugs, handing one to her friend. "That is what I am here for. The little silly things are just as important."

The street below was already lined with people holding lanterns, singing, playing musical instruments, and holding water jugs. Then the sound of many running feet echoed down the street and the night runners appeared, hundreds of naked Seylan women and men running in celebration for being alive. Sule and Tilva eyed one another and smiled, both laughing as the runners came even to the balcony.

Sule waited a moment though and watched Tilva. Her friend looked so happy, filled with joy, as she upended her water onto the parade of runners below them. She handed Tilva her jug as well and nodded, smiling. Her friend may never get the chance to do this again and the joy she felt watching her made Sule smile. Afterwards they embraced, laying their heads against together, watching the stream of runners go by and then disappear down another street.

"Promise me Sule, that no matter what happens, we will always be friends."

She hugged Tilva tighter, her friend had such a difficult life ahead of her, leading a nation was no easy task. "Of course, without question, always. Now come, it's your move."

