Chapter 50

“So, how many fights were you in Dragon?”

“About five really, and my name is Keely.”

“And what kind of sword is that Dragon?”

“It’s not much different than a long sword really. Perhaps a little thinner. And my name is Keely.”

“Was it you idea to put flames on sheath, Dragon?”

“No, Atsuma asked for it like that. If you’ll look, it matches Koroko’s outfit. And my name is Keely.”

The team had left the grey territory that Keely called home and was now heading west. They had been traveling for a couple of hours now and in that time they had seen some Golds but for now it was safe to walk in the open. For the trip, Atsuma Koroko and Pandora led the way. Talking amongst themselves. Baas and Dragon followed behind them. When he wasn’t hiding from enemies, Baas took the time to ask Keely all sorts of questions. He was really fascinated in the fact that she had been masquerading as the Dragon. Right behind them was Sheina. For the time, she was frustrated but no one really noticed because she was so good at hiding it. Especially Baas who was too fascinated with the person next to him.

“And did you make the sword just so you could fight with it Dragon?”

“Yes, except for the Dragon on the handle. That was an order that was never picked up. It actually inspired me to become the Dragon. And please, call me Keely.

“Right Dragon, but let me ask you…”

“Ugh Baas you are so annoying!” Sheina said loudly.

“What’s wrong?” Keely asked.

“Oh don’t mind her.” Baas said with a grin. “She just gets upset when someone doesn’t show ‘proper manners.’ Which means she’s always upset with me.”

“Baas.” Sheina continued. “If she asked you to stop calling her Dragon, then you should probably stop calling her that. The Discretes made it clear that Dragon was suppose to die.”

“You worry too much.” Baas said brushing the air. “Besides, Dragon is such a cool name. And I bet she loves talking about her past life. Right Dragon?”

“Actually,” Keely admitted, “I wanted to ask her something.” She then pointed at Sheina.

That caught both Baas and Sheina by surprise.

“Your swords,” Keely said while continuing her walk. “Did you make them? I’ve never seen a better design for twin swords.”

Sheina began to blush.

“Actually they were a gift.”

“Wow, someone must’ve really liked you a lot. The details in the blades are great.”

“I know.” Baas came in. “The way the thickness of her blades curve…”

“So that they move with her motion, but not so much…”

“That they can’t reconnect together.”

“Wow, I’m impressed.” Keely said to Baas. “Let me guess, you made these right?”

“Are you kidding?” Atsuma voice came in. He and the other two had slowed down out of curiosity to see what the discussion was. “Baas is only sixteen, he’s never forged a weapon before.”

“Oh that’s right.” Keely realized. “You just got out of the Center. I keep forgetting since you seem to know a lot about fighting and whatnot.”

“Comes from training I guess.” Baas said shrugging.

“What about you, what’s your age?” Keely asked to Sheina.

“The Squirt is eighteen.” Atsuma said. “And, if I’m not mistaken, soon to be nineteen.”

“Oh is that your name?” Dragon asked. “Squirt.”

Baas let out a loud snicker when he heard that.

Before Sheina could respond, she could hear Atsuma mocking her, shaking his head as he spoke.

“Tsk tsk tsk Squirt. We’ve been out here all this time and you haven’t properly introduced yourself? Tsk tsk tsk.”

Baas and Koroko then shook their head simultaneously exactly as Atsuma had.

“Tsk Tsk Tsk.”

Sheina made an angry face at all of them. But she calmed herself down and began her introductory.

“My apologies Keely. Being out here with these guys has made me more barbaric than I would like to admit. Hello. They say my name is Sheina.”

“Who is ‘they?’” Keely asked.

There was a slight paused before Baas asked. “What?”

“Who is ‘they’?” Keely repeated. “Whenever a color band introduces themselves to me, they always say ‘they say my name is.’ Well, who says that?”

Sheina and Baas looked at each other.

“I… I don’t know.” Baas said pondering. “I never thought about it before.”

“Me either.” Sheina admitted. “Is it just something everyone says?”

“Hey.” Baas asked Koroko and Pandora. “Do you guys know who ‘they’ is?”

After thinking about it for sometime, Koroko spoke up.

“Maybe it’s… I don’t know.”

“I think… no that’s not it. Huh. That’s weird.” Pandora tried.

“I mean we say it all the time.” Baas pointed out. “You would think we would have some idea as to who ‘they’ is.”

“’They’ are the Discretes.” Atsuma said suddenly. Everyone turned and looked at him.

“Oh yeah,” Koroko said jokingly. “How do you know?”

“Because.” Atsuma said turning away. “I had a child remember.”

That comment made everyone silent. They had all forgotten, but something had happened to Sean that Atsuma didn’t like to talk about. Atsuma was able to continue his explanation.

“When you have a child, the rules of Wig say that the only thing you are allowed to give them before they go to the Center is their name. That is the only connection you are allowed to have to the child. But we go to the Center at such a young age that we can’t remember if our parents gave us that name or not. So we say ‘the Discretes say my name is…” because we don’t know if that’s really true or not.”

Once again, the air was silent. Everyone was pondering what to say, or what to do next. Atsuma lifted his head up and spoke, trying to hold in a painful memory.

“Alright, let’s keep moving.”

Before he could take two steps though, Pandora reached over and put her hands on his shoulder.

“Atsuma.” She said softly. “What aren’t you telling us? What happened to Sean?”

“It’s… come on, we got to…”

Koroko walked over and put his hand on Atsuma’s other shoulder.

Atsuma turned to face both of his friends. There were tears in his eyes. Tears from a painful memory. One of which he was about to share.

Chapter 50 End

Chapter 51

“What do you think he’ll be like?” Arttior asked Atsuma, though she was not looking at him. She was too busy watching her son sleep. Her precious Sean. She could not stop marveling at how beautiful he was, not since he had been born. Even with the nice house she and Atsuma were allowed to occupy through Sean’s childhood, she could only think of him. He was almost three now and he seemed more beautiful to her then the day he had been born. Still, that did not stop Atsuma from answering the question.

“What kind of question is that?” Atsuma said walking from what he was doing. “He’s going to be a Leader just like his old man.”

“That would be nice. Maybe he’d even make his way back to us.” Arttior smiled.

“Yeah.” Atsuma agreed. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

Atsuma stared at Sean with great love in his eyes.

“Why do you think they stay so small?” He asked his wife. “After three years, you think he would have grown a little more by now.”

Arttior giggled at the question.

“Babies don’t start truly maturing until they’re three. That’s probably why the Discretes want us to give them up then. You know, there’s a rumor that before the war, babies matured all throughout their infancy.”

“That’s a silly rumor.” Atsuma smiled. “What, did the war change us so that we couldn’t grow until we were three years old?”

“You never know.”

“I’ll never care either. If it was before the war, I don’t think anyone would care.”

“You’re cute when you’re ignorant.”

“And you’re cute when you’re annoying.”

The two exchanged a quick kiss to each other and then when back to marveling their son.

“I’m gonna miss him.” Arttior said smiling softly. “It’s too bad we can’t be with him.”

“Yeah.” Atsuma agreed. Then he looked up and forward. He wasn’t really looking at anything, he had just gotten an idea.

“Wait, we can be.” He said. Then he quickly left to go to another room. Arttior could here different things being shuffled around as her husband was searching for something. A moment later, he came back with something in his left hand.

“What is that?” Arttior asked immediately.

“It’s something very special to me.” Atsuma then release his hand to reveal a silver necklace. At the end of it was a red jewel about the size of the pupil of an eye.

“This jewel was embedded in the sword of the very first person I killed. I’ve kept it with me for a while. Eventually, I had Altea make it into a necklace for me.”

He then placed the necklace slightly inside of Sean’s diaper. The only thing he was wearing.

“Atsuma!” Arttior panicked. “What are you doing!?”

“It’s a way I can always be close to him.”

“I realize that. But you know the rules of Wig. He can’t have any ties leading back to where he came from. The Officials say a child may try to find their way back to their original country which is unfair.”

Atsuma rolled his eyes.

“I know what those scaredy cats say. But come on, do you honestly think we can get in trouble for something this small?”

“We? No. You? Yes.”

“You worry too much.”

“Atsuma, if you break the rules of Wig the Officials will black band you and the Discretes will come down here and kill you. I don’t want to watch you die.”

“Come on Arty, it’s just a little jewel. How would the Discretes even find it or know what it was for? If they found it, they would most likely think it was left there accidently.”

Arttior was quiet after that. Her look showed that she was still concerned. That she knew something bad would happen if he went through with this. She could not think of a way to convince him though.

“You’ll see.” Atsuma said reassuringly. “Everything’s gonna be just fine.”

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“Soon after that, the Discretes came to take Sean away. It’s weird how they travel all the long way they do, just to pick up one 3 year old. I, of course, did not listen to Arty and left the red jewel in Sean’s diaper.”

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“But I definitely wish I had.”

There was a moment of silence before Atsuma continued.

“There was some days that passed by after Sean went to the Center…”

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Atsuma and Arttior continued to sweep the floor of the living room in the midst of the night. Atsuma had started from the door and Arttior had started from the inside. They were to meet in the middle as they did with the other rooms. With Sean gone, they were no longer aloud to stay in one of the family houses and needed to clean up for the next family that would use it. The air was moist. It might have been because of the rainy atmosphere or it might have been the water they had been using to clean the house.

“Well. That about does it.” Atsuma said scooping up the dirt.

“Right,” Arttior said. Her voice then got low. “Now I just have to get my nicknacks from my room.”

“What!?” Atsuma asked loudly. “I told you to do that first! That’s gonna take forever!”

“I know.” Arttior said smiling innocently. “But when you asked me to do it, I just… didn’t.”

Atsuma squinted his eyes. He then sighed and let out a smile. “You are the expert on getting me angry, do you know that?”

“I practice everyday in the mirror.” Arttior said with a sassy smile. She then left the room to go and get her stuff.

“Man do I love that woman.” Atsuma said with a daydreaming gaze. His gaze didn’t last long though as he turned when he heard a noise at his doorstep. He turned to see what it was. There, standing at his door, was a man dressed in a black suit that covered everything but his face. On his face were sunglasses which matched his black hair.

“A Discete.” Atsuma said shocked in a low voice. As everyone did when they saw a Discrete, his mind went through all the bad things he had done in his life. Hopefully, the Discrete was not here to punish him for any of those things.

“Can I help you?” Atsuma asked walking toward the door.

“Atsuma of Orange,” the Discrete said in a deep voice. “I have come to speak with you. It is about the child you turned in whom you told the Discretes his name was Sean.”

At that moment, as though on cue, lighting flashed in the sky outside and was quickly followed by thunder. Atsuma felt his heart skip a beat. He turned to make sure Arttior had not heard the man. He then hurried the Discrete out the door.

“Let’s discuss this outside.” He said.

The Discrete agreed and proceeded to walk out onto the rocky trail of the Orange territory.

There wasn’t anyone nearby. It was late and most of the families staying in that part of the of the territory had early bed times. It was dark. No stars or moon showed due to the heavy rain clouds in the sky. Atsuma did not have to worry about being seen or anyone overhearing, so long as Arttior stayed busy.

“You said this is about Sean?” Atsuma asked eager and yet afraid of what the man might say.

“Yes.” The expressionless Discrete answered. There was a minor pause before he continued.

“When the Discretes examined the child, he was only found wearing a diaper. However, inside his diaper was a small red jewel. You put this jewel there in hopes of having a connection to the child.”

This was not a question. The Discrete was telling Atsuma what he had done. Atsuma was scared. He had known the penalty of breaking the rules of Wig-Or-Log. His thoughts went from bad to worse. This might be his last night of being an Orange band. It might be his last night living. Then, a thought worse then any other hit his mind. The Discretes might also blame Arty for his actions.

“Okay.” He said with a smirk on his face. “You got me. So do I get some kind of warning or are you gonna black band and kill me right here?” Atsuma knew there was no denying it. He wanted to, but he knew it was useless. He did not know how, but the Discretes seemed to always be right when they accused someone of breaking a law. Still, he was hoping they would in no way penalize Arty. He was ready to accept, by himself, whatever punishment he deserved for his idiot move. As per usual.

“Well…” Atsuma said with the smirk still on him. “I’m waiting for an answer.”

The Discrete was silent for a minor moment still. Then, he spoke again.

“You misunderstand me Atsuma of Orange. The punishment for this, will not be your death. You’re son, Sean, however, is not allowed to participate in the war.”

It took a moment for Atsuma to comprehend the words that were spoken to him.

“What?”

“He has been compromised. At the age of three, he could remember the jewel that was given to him even slightly. With a memorial of his father with him, he wouldn’t be able to participate fairly in the war as he would, subconsciously, be on the lookout for his father.”

“What are you saying?” Atsuma asked getting upset.

“Exactly what it sounds like. With your son breaking the rules of having a link to his past, his case was brought before the Officials of Wig-Or-Log and he was black banded before reaching the Center.”

Thunder banged through the air again. Those words seemed to slow down time for Atsuma. It felt like quite a while before the Discretes other words hit him.

“And I’m sure you know what happens when a person surrounded by Discretes turns into a black band.”

The thought of that, made Atsuma jump at the Discrete and grab his collar.

“Why?” He asked with tears in his eyes. “Why did you take it out on him!? I’m the one who broke the rules! Why did you take it out on my son!? You could’ve thrown the jewel away, or… or sent him to a grey territory, or…”

At that moment, a slap ran across Atsuma’s face. The Discrete had moved at a speed that made it so Atsuma could not have possibly kept up. The rain began to pour on the two, but Atsuma hit the ground before the first drop did. The Discrete kept his nonchalant face, showing no concern for the water hitting his entire body.

“You decided the fate of your son when you made a selfish decision. Do not blame us.”

“But why not me?” Atsuma asked on the fround. “Why didn’t you just kill me?”

“Because, the punishment of a crime is to ensure it does not happen again. To kill a person who has compromised his son will do nothing. The son is already been compromised. But, when the parent knows the pain of losing a child because of a decision they made… they’ll make sure that it doesn’t happen again.”

“So what am I suppose to do? Just live on with my life knowing he’s dead?”

“Yes. And if someone you know plans on making a decision like this, you can convince them to think twice. Because you know the pain should they not heed your advice.”

For a moment, only the sound of the rain hitting the ground could be heard. Atsuma was making many sounds of sadness, but they weren’t distinguishable. The Discrete slowly turned away from him and proceeded to go back into his house.

“Now if you’ll excuse me, I need to go tell your wife.”

With those words, Atsuma quickly gathered himself.

“No!” he called out. He then got up to intercept the man.

“No. No don’t. Please… don’t tell her.”

“I have a job to do Atsuma of Orange. And the last I checked you were not an Official.”

“Please.” Atsuma begged in the midst of crying. “She… she doesn’t need to know. You said it yourself. A punishment is to ensure the action never happens again. Arty was against me doing it from the start. The crime is all mine.”

The Discrete stared at Atsuma as though that information did not phase him.

“Please.” Atsuma continued begging. “She didn’t do anything.” Atsuma then turned back to look inside. “She doesn’t need to feel this pain.”

He turned back to the Discrete to continue his begging, but, to his surprise, the man was gone.

“Atsuma.” Arttior called from the inside. Atsuma didn’t hear her. He looked around for the man whom had been right in front of him a second ago.

“Atsuma.”

Where had the man gone? Did he agree to keep it a secret?

“Atsuma. Ats, what are you doing standing in the rain?”

Atsuma snapped out of his gaze and looked at his wife. He felt like crying again thinking about what must have happened to his son. No. He couldn’t. Not in front of her. She would know something was wrong and ask him what. And he couldn’t tell her what. He would never tell her what. But he had to talk about it to someone.

“I..uh…” he said trying to sound like his usual self. “I need to go talk to Vee. She wants us to go on our next mission with her and the old group.”

“You have to do that right no…”

“Yes… sorry.” Atsuma said rushing away. He was glad that it had been raining. Otherwise Arty would have seen the tears on his face. He just couldn’t tell her what he had done to their son. Not ever. But there was one person he could talk to.

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“And that…” Atsuma said with a deep sigh. “Is what happened. Sean is dead because of a stupid decision I made.”

Pandora sat there with her hands covering her mouth. There were tears flowing from her eyes.

Koroko stared at the floor hard. He was concentrating on something. What it was, he did not know. But he knew as long as he concentrated, he would not cry.

Sheina and Keely were comforting each other. Tears were pouring down their eyes as they took in the sad news.

Baas was alone. Tears were also falling from his eyes. But he felt more than just sadness. He felt curious. An emotion he just couldn’t seem to get control over.

“So…” he asked hesistantly, “Did you ever tell Arty before she… you know.”

“No.” Atsuma said wiping his eyes. “The only person I told about this was Vee who comforted me and let me know that everything would be okay. Though I would never have wanted Arty to die, it’s a good thing she did thinking that her son was going to be a great Leader someday.”

That thought did not help the situation. Atsuma looked around at his team. They were all highly upset. He could tell there wouldn’t be much more they could do today.

“We’ll camp here for tonight.” He said after catching his breath. “I know it’s early but everyone obviously has a lot on their mind.”

Atsuma then walked over to Baas who was sitting down. Baas looked up at Atsuma. He saw the smirk on Atsuma’s face.

“Cheer up kid.” Atsuma said to him. He then leaned down and whispered in his ear. “You’re making it awkward for everyone.”

Baas smiled at that. That was what Atsuma had wanted.

“I’m sorry, for… what happened to Sean.” Baas said trying to sound sincere.

“Don’t be sorry kid, you didn’t do anything. Besides, that happened ten years ago.”

“Ten years? When I first saw you I thought you were like twenty-five. How old are you?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know? Look, the point is, feeling down about it isn’t going to change the past. We can’t do anything about it now. We just need to be aware of it.”

Baas got it. They couldn’t stay miserable forever. They would have to get past this awkwardness. Something Baas could excel at with others. And he knew just where to start. He got up and ran over toward Sheina and Keely.

“Hey Dragon…” he called out to them.

Before thirty seconds had gone by, Atsuma could already hear Sheina fussing at Baas. He smiled at that. Even though he had lost one of his families in the past, he was glad he still had this one with him. And he wasn’t about to lose them. Including Vanessa.

Chapter 51 End