

Thunderous echoes of water crashing into rocky pools rose up along the cliff. A shadowy figure clad in black robes and dark metal peered over lip, the true bottom of the falls obscured by rising mists. Along the sides of the cliff the forest reached out over the edge, dozens of streams spilling between the roots to join the roar below. Turning back he called out to his companions.

“No sign of them here! Spread out! There’s nowhere for them to run now!”

Before he continued on to join them a bird’s tune made him turn back. Distaste crossed his face and he raised his blade searching for the annoying creature. A sudden purple glow appeared from within the leaves, and by the next breath he was collapsing, a gleaming feather erupting from his heart.

Xayah gracefully dropped out of the tree, retrieving her quill and taking cover behind a nearby boulder. Glancing over the edge she could see more acolytes scouring the area.

“KiroNa!” She cursed under her breath. “They must have known we were coming. They’ll find us soon”. Xayah turned, surprised to find herself alone. “Rakan!?” calling out in a harsh whisper. Suddenly the sound a snapping branches and rustling leaves came from the canopy above. Xayah tensed readying her feather blades, before a golden mass of feathers dropped out from above.

“Oof” Rakan landing in a tumbled mess, quickly shifting to be in a lying position resting his head in his hand and draped in his feather cloak; as though he had meant to land there. “Oh hey Xayah!” he managed through a wince.

“Ugh this is no time for games Rakan, we’re surrounded.” She turned back to peer over the boulder at the growing number of acolytes. “I’ll take the ones on the left, you distract the ones on the right and any that come to help. Ok?” She paused to wait for Rakan’s response. “Ok!?” Still no reply. “Rakan are you even listening, this is seri..” Her words caught in her throat as she turned to see Rakan grasping his blood stained torso. “Rakan. You're hurt..”

“Noo, I’ll be fine just gotta dance it off is all” He chuckled, but the wince from the effort and blood on his lip betrayed him. Xayah sat in stunned silence her thoughts racing and blood boiling, but she couldn’t move muscle. Rakan pushed himself to his knees his wound making it hard to move, he wouldn’t be able to dance for long even with his magic. At least he always did look good in red. Chuckling at the somber thought again caused a wince to cross his face.

“Miela...” Rakan paused to take out his golden pocket mirror that never left his side. “Before we go out there I need to ask you...” Rakan passed his hand over the golden mirror and when he opened it it showed not his reflection, but a beautiful Vastayan brooch with Rakan’s golden feathers arranged alongside Xayah’s violet, all affixed to a precious stone. “Miela my heart beats for you always, wherever we go my home is within your arms and yours within mine.” Wincing again from his wound he continued. “If I’m not able to ask you tomorrow.. Xayah will you marry me?” Xayah stood shocked still, everything had gone silent, the woodland nightlife, the searching acolytes, even the thunderous falls ceased to exist for a moment. Rakan kneeling before her was all there was, and the thought of losing him running over and over in her mind. It couldn’t happen. She wouldn’t let it happen. Even if she had to kill every acolyte in Ionia she would save him. Her stupor was interrupted by Rakan coughing and dropping a hand to support himself. Xayah reached out to support him holding him in her arms, before withdrawing to hold his hand. “Mieli...” Gently she closed the golden pocket mirror till it clicked shut and pushed it into his chest. “My heart beats for you as well...” Rakan in turn was shocked by her gesture, his mouth left slightly agape and his ear tufts drooping as he looked into Xayah’s tear filled eyes. “But for you to marry me, you will have to ask me tomorrow.” Smiling as much as he could through his pain, Rakan closed his eyes as they embraced one another. “You always were hard to get” he said chuckling. He turned his head to look out over the cliff into the valley below. The mist from the falls catching the moonlight filling the air with stars. Every breath he took he could feel the rich wild-magic pulsing through this land. “I’d like to come here again sometime” he whispered.

“Yeah?” Xayah helped him to his feet. “Well, try not to die then.” She said as she readied a set a feathers in her hand with a mischievous smile. Rakan took and deep breath and with it borrowed as much magic as he could from the land. “Shall I show them the dance darling?”