

The winds, Taric found, were the worst part about Targon. When the air was still, the cold held its place, and it was tolerable. But on nights like this, the freezing air cut against him like invisible blades, its strong current pushing against him, as if trying to turn him back the way he came.

He sometimes wondered why he didn't heed the winds, why he made himself suffer so. Runeterra was a big place, and he could have easily settled somewhere far from Demacia and started a new life. But for whatever reason, his soul, that which had been urging Taric to disobey his entire life, was now driving him through what was possibly the last task he would ever undergo. It was ironic, he'd thought many a time; for once he had actually listened when given a task, and more likely than not it was going to end up killing him.

Though his mind was determined, his body was slowly losing its fight. As the winds seemed to pick up to an impossible speed, he felt his muscles weaken, his legs giving out below him as he collapsed backwards into the snow. His body was completely numb, and he could only watch as snow began to blanket him, slowly but surely burying him alive. He almost felt like weeping, though he had no energy to do so. And in the snow being whipped around above him, he swore he saw a figure looking at him.

*"Taric."*

The voice was one he had not heard in years, ringing out to him like a bell. Immediately he shot upright, his senses on high alert. Targon had a cruel way of playing tricks on him, making him see and hear things that would fade just as soon as they appeared. The visions of creatures he'd encountered had always been violent, angry things, but this one filled him with a warmth he hadn't felt in weeks. It was the shape of a woman, her long, dark hair dancing in the wind as she approached. He saw it clutching something in the palm of its hand as it approached; a brilliant blue jewel hanging from a silver chain. He reached out to touch it, to touch her, but the spirit stopped in front of him, wearing a smile that made his heart sing.

"Taric," she said again. "You must get up. You aren't meant to die here."

"I know," he whispered. He was silent for a moment, just taking the sight of her in; he had almost forgotten what she looked like. "What are you doing here?"

"You dropped this." Finally, she touched him, pressing the jewelry into the palm of his hand. "I told you, if you have this stone, a piece of me will always be with you. Hopefully this will not be lost as easily as a ring."

Turning the necklace over in his hand, Taric instantly knew it was the same gem from the ring he'd lost days ago. Memories of sitting on his mother's deathbed returned to him; he had barely been a teenager when she passed, lost to some illness that slowly ate away at her body and mind. He found it unfair that someone as kind and strong as she was could be taken so easily. The stone was her final gift to him, a piece of his mother's soul, one that he thought he'd never see it again. Wordlessly, she embraced him, and finally his tears flowed forth, sobs wracking his body. He hadn't realized how much he'd missed something as simple as a hug. How nice it was, to be held by her one last time.

When he next opened his eyes she was gone, as he'd expected, but he could still feel the cool metal clutched in his hand. To his surprise, the wind had almost completely stopped, the gentle breeze lacking the same bite it had moments ago. Taric stood, wiping his eyes before staring into the clear, vast sky. He had never been able to see the stars so clearly as he had on the mountain, and the sight left him in awe every time, compelling him to temporarily forget his plight and take in their beauty. His gaze was fixed upward as he draped the pendant around his neck, enjoying its subtle weight.

He took a deep breath; he was alive, as far as he could tell, and that was enough for the time being. Against his body's wishes, he began trudging through the snow once more, the drive that pushed him onward now stronger than ever. Taric had no idea why *this* was the order he finally planned on following, but he knew in his soul that he was going to see it done.