

INT. DINING HALL - NIGHT

Inara sits at the head of a large, wooden table in the barren dining hall. Though tall windows surround her, darkness hovers near Inara. She is lit only by the dim light of fire lanterns against the wall.

The great doors creak open. Tala enters and curtsies to Inara. She takes a seat to the right of her.

TALA

Good 'morrow, Your Majesty.

Inara's eyes roam over Tala.

INARA

Where is Samora?

TALA

She has taken ill.

INARA

I was with her last night, I would know if she was ill.

TALA

Lady Lyss said it's so. If it pleases you, I will taste your food today.

Inara doesn't answer.

They sit in a weighted silence. Inara wears a deep frown. Her hands clench around the arm rest of her chair.

TALA (CONT'D)

Your Majesty, forgive me if I'm being too bold, but you don't seem to be in too high of spirits.

Inara glares at her.

INARA

You are here to see that my food is not poisoned, not to remark upon my spirits.

TALA

Forgive me.

INARA

I have been too forgiving. Those that cross me have bore no punishment. That will soon change.

TALA

I see.

Tala fiddles with the silverware in front of her as she clears her throat.

TALA (CONT'D)

Do you know of Queen Cleo, Your Majesty?

INARA

You think me a halfwit?

TALA

I mean no such insult. Queen Cleo was a noble, she was good of heart. Her people adored her for it. It was only after the death of Prince Frederick that her rule had changed. She became ruthless, cold. She sent countless men to their deaths for crossing her. Beloved and despised in the span of a decade.

INARA

Your point?

TALA

I may be naive, but instead of punishing those who are ignorant, maybe we should help bring them to the light.

INARA

Indeed. The light of the pyre.

Tala takes a confident sip of Inara's wine.

TALA

If you are to put me to the stake, Your Majesty, I am sorry to hear it. I have quite enjoyed your brief company.

Tala places the wine directly in front of Inara.

INARA

The gall of you. Are you not afraid?

TALA

Of you?

Inara nods.

TALA (CONT'D)  
Do you want me to be?

INARA  
(hesitates)  
I am not quite sure.

TALA  
Forgive me, but I do not believe  
you want to be feared.

INARA  
Preposterous. Who does not want to  
be feared? Respected?

TALA  
Do you believe they are the same?

INARA  
Yes. No. My father was feared.  
Despised by most of his people, but  
feared, all the same.  
(to herself)  
And look where that got him.

TALA  
I am sorry for your loss.

Inara stares at her for a long moment.

INARA  
You may be the first person to say  
that, that I actually believe.

TALA  
Losing a parent is an awful thing.  
Losing your whole family? Well,  
it's quite unimaginable.

INARA  
You know of loss?

TALA  
Quite well, my parents abandoned me  
when I was just shy of puberty.

INARA  
Ah. What a pair we make.  
(beat)  
Do you not crave vengeance?

TALA

I prefer the taste of mercy. It  
helps me sleep at night.

Tala takes a rather large bite of bread.

CUT TO: