

## **PART THREE**

# *Fragmented Memories*

### In the past....

Booker was still in genuine astonishment as he exited the bathroom adjusting the waistband of his light umber colored inmate uniform pants. “Even the toilet on this sum’bitch is nice!” he said. “But this air pressure keeps fuckin’ wit my ears. It’s startin’ to piss me off. I’m getting’ tired of havin’ to pop my ears every five minutes.” Furious at his recurring airplane ear, Booker returned to repeatedly opening and closing his mouth as if he had the uncontrollable urge to yawn every few seconds. “Yo! Pilot!” He shouted while violently jiggling the handle to the cockpit door to see if, per his earlier demands, he had been permitted entry. “Keep it locked then! I don’t give a shit! Too bad they put the shitter right next to you! You can ignore me but you most definitely gon’ smell me later!” He teased while gently and repeatedly pulling down on the lobules of his ears simultaneously and hoping it would serve as a more expedient method to relieving his airplane ear.

“Booker! Chill the fuck out bruh!”

Despite the humming of the jet’s engine, as well as the creamy pasta and shrimp Alfredo he continued to stuff in his mouth, Rowland still made sure to project his croaky voice loud enough for his fellow inmate to hear, and at the same time, unintentionally spit out chewed food particles that garnished the uneaten portions of food on his plate. “You been on ten since we boarded. I bet niggas couldn’t take yo ass nowhere when you were out.”

“I’m just fuckin’ wit whoever it is in there. We ain’t seen the pilot at all, I just wanna know who steerin’. Maybe it’s a bitch I can get at since it ain’t no stewardess on here to look at. It’s just y’all three niggas I was already locked up with and the kitchen on wheels.” Booker then glared at the food cart as it rolled by him, heading down the carpeted aisle, and then stopping at the divan where Darrell sat.

“Why can’t you just enjoy yo’self?” Darrell asked while removing a chilled plate with a thick slice of strawberry swirled cheesecake from one of the compartments of the cart. “You

ain't in a holding tank right now. You're on a private jet. After this, you'll never be on another one again. So, thank Rowland we ain't on a cargo plane like they said we would be on, sit yo ass down, and enjoy the spoils you'll never make enough to partake in again my nigga."

"Leather reclining seats, mahogany wood paneling, five-star cuisine, and top of the line alcohol. I had to pull a bunch of strings and payoff a good amount of folks in high places to get us on this jet. And I feel like you're being ungrateful, Booker." Rowland added and then taking a sip of his wine.

"I'd be grateful if both y'all shut the fuck up and let me do me. How about that?" Booker then plopped down in the aisle seat diagonally across from Ezra sitting in the window seat.

"Bruh, is you deaf or mute or some shit?" He asked. "You ain't said a word since you got on this muthafucka either."

"Bruh been actin' weird since they loaded us on the bus." Darrell replied.

"What's to you my nigga? You gotta problem? You think you better than us?"

Ezra ignored Booker's question and seemed unbothered by the growing tension that was starting to taint the otherwise calm atmosphere. He had been staring out the window, keeping his attention on the clouds that the wing of the jet sliced through like a dull knife through a marshmallow, and carried on as if he were the only inmate on the jet.

"You better chill out Booker." Rowland remarked. "You know they say that it's the quiet ones you gotta watch out for." He added and laughing afterwards.

"Bro, fuck all that, I'll knock this nigga out and throw his ass off this plane right now. Say I won't."

Booker's threat provoked Ezra to finally turn his attention towards him, prompting both to glare at each other with the most intimidating scowl they could express, exacerbating the tension, and probably would have attacked one another that very moment if it was not for the table in between them.

"And you honestly think the pilot is gon' be cool with you tossin' niggas off the plane?" Rowland nonchalantly questioned while stuffing another spoonful of pasta in his mouth.

"This yo people shit, ain't it? That means the pilot is gang. So, he knows what's up." Booker replied, keeping his disapproving frown on Ezra, but had yet to show any movement that would have indicated he was planning to make good on his threats.

"Bruh, just wait until we land. It might turn out that we need the nigga." Darrell implied.

“Now that’s a thinking man right there!” Rowland had praised after raising his glass in a toast to the statement.

“Whatever nigga.” Booker mumbled and then slouching back in his chair.

Seeing that things had calmed down for the moment, Ezra also relaxed and returned his attention back to the picturesque view of the night’s sky on the other side of the window.

Booker, who was unhappy not being able to follow through with his threat, rolled his eyes at the sight of Ezra’s return to his taciturn demeanor.

“Where the fuck is we goin’ anyway? We been on this jet for hours now.”

“Booker, I know yo public defender explained everything to you like all of ours did before we left county. Were you not listenin’?” Darrell asked.

The jet then began to suddenly change altitudes, which caused the food cart to stop at Booker’s seat before disappearing into the narrow space between the cockpit and lavatory but prompted Ezra to subtly clinch the armrests of his recliner due to the turbulence.

“All I heard was that I wasn’t goin’ to prison, and I was boarding a cargo plane with three other niggas.” Booker had removed an unopened chilled bottle of wine, along with a wine glass, and was attempting to open the bottle. “A nigga ain’t goin’ to prison was all that I needed to hear. I can’t wait to get through with this ‘Tomb Raider’ shit they got us doin’ so I can go get me some pussy.”

Darrell shook his head as he watched Booker struggle to open the wine bottle.

“We still goin’ back to county nigga. They just reducin’ our sentences and we ain’t goin’ to prison. I knew yo ass didn’t listen.”

“Who said we have to go back to county?” Rowland queried.

Both Darrell and Booker stared at Rowland with a similar expression of bewilderment and awaiting an explanation for his preposterous question. Even Ezra looked on with curiosity and waited for him to continue.

“Come on now, y’all didn’t think I paid all that bread and pulled strings just so we can get to this stupid ass island they sendin’ us to in style, did you? We’re thousands of miles away from LA.”

“We thousands of miles away from the U.S. Government!” Darrell enthusiastically added.

“Exactly. Once we land, I’ll have the pilot find and get rid of whatever tracking shit they got on this plane, because I know they got somethin’ on here because this ain’t my jet, even though I paid for them to get mine, but anyway, we ditch this bullshit ass exploration mission, and be on our way to freedom.” Rowland confidently explained.

Darrell then rolled up his right pant leg and revealed his ankle monitor just below his shin, which was secured by screws drilled into the bone, and looked as if it were meant to be worn permanently.

“Unless you got surgical equipment, then it don’t matter where we are, they gon’ find us.”

“You don’t think I know that?” Rowland asked as if he were offended by Darrell’s reminder. “I contacted one of my boys who’s a mechanic and he can get rid of these damn things no problem. It’s gon’ hurt, but y’know, no pain no gain. So, when we land just follow my lead and we’ll all be back to doin’ what we do in the world gentlemen.”

The subtle shakes of the jet from the turbulence suddenly transformed into violent jerks, which caused Rowland to spill more than half his glass of red wine onto himself, and the other three inmates to clinch the armrests of their reclining seats in fear.

“See?! What I tell y’all niggas!” Booker shouted.

“It’s just turbulence. You ain’t never been on a plane before? It’s just the wind. The pilots got it under control.” Rowland replied calmly as he blotted the spill on his shirt with the napkin.

The jet then began to shake even more violently, prompting the emergency lights to flash, alert signals to sound, and oxygen masks to drop down overhead.

“This ain’t just turbulence!” Booker yelled as he watched Ezra rise from his seat and make his way to the aisle.

“Yo! Where the fuck is you goin’?!” Darrell shouted at Ezra.

All three inmates looked on with curiosity at Ezra wobble back and forth, using the armrest of each reclining chair he gradually passed to help keep his balance, and stay upright as he struggled to make his way to the cockpit door.

“Bro! You good in there?!” Ezra yelled as he banged on the door.

The jet then went dark, the door slid open, and to the dismay of all the inmates revealed an empty cockpit just before the jet suddenly dropped into a nosedive. And without a second thought, Ezra immediately....

## In the present...

.....entered from the kitchen with a glass of water in each hand for Marquis and Nihari.

He handed one of the glasses over to Nihari, who, rather than receive it, immediately raised her brow at the water, and then glared back at Ezra.

“It’s water. It’s not from under the kitchen sink. I’m just tryna be hospitable.”

Nihari glared at the water again, back at Ezra, then snatched the glass from his hand, spilling a quarter of it onto the dirty linoleum floor of the common area in the co-living home, then slamming it down onto the long crimson wood coffee table hard enough to show her distrust, but gentle enough that the glass didn’t break.

Ezra shook his head at the overly dramatic action as he attempted to offer Marquis the second glass of water

“I’m good.”

Not at all surprised by Marquis’s response, Ezra sat the glass down on the table, placing a coaster under both glasses, and then took a seat in the recliner adjacent to the sofa.

“I know the couch is old and could use a shampoo, but it isn’t going to come alive and swallow you. I’d feel more comfortable talking to the both of you if you sat. I’d appreciate it.”

Both Marquis and Nihari each found a moderately clean spot on the edge of the unflattering and tattered tangerine colored sofa and sat.

“I almost chose to leave you two out there and just let the police deal with you, but that would’ve just made things worse.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“That this nigga is a snitch.” Marquis responded as if the answer were obvious.

Ezra sighed.

“From the both of your responses, I’m going to assume that it slipped your minds that there are cameras on the PA-90’s, and that the footage from those cameras are uploaded to the servers of the Los Angeles Police Department in real-time. What do you think is going to happen when the footage from those destroyed robots are seen? Both your faces would be all over the media as breaking news. And as fate would have it, that happened thirty minutes ago. That was just two. What do you plan on doing when there’s a whole fleet of PA-90 units coming for you, young lady?”

After hearing this, Marquis immediately began patting his pockets like an avid smoker desperately in search of his lighter.

“I left my phone in the damn car, but he’s lying, right? Tell me you did not just make me public enemy number one. Bruh, I’m on probation.”

Nihari, on the other hand, kissed her teeth after hearing the information.

“I don’t care who knows my face. I’m among the ranks of the most dangerous people alive. If not the dangerous. I could care less about an army of human officers, android officers, or otherwise. And I didn’t come here for a nightly news update. Like I said before, I’m here for The Dark Blade. Just give me the sword, this can all end peacefully, and I can be on my way.”

Ezra took a deep breath and once again shook his head in disappointment at both their replies.

“What was your name again young lady?”

“You don’t need to know my name to give me the sword.”

“It’s Nihari.” Marquis answered. “Her name is Nihari”

“Okay Nihari, I’m sure you’re aware that I’ve been dealing with your fellow coworkers for some years now, and the pattern I’ve noticed has always been them ambushing me in groups. Which never worked out in their favor. Fortunately, for those who were tasked with hunting me, I was finally able to fall off the grid. But since it’s clearly only you, I can’t help but wonder, with all due respect, does your superior know that one of her subordinates is out playing rogue agent?”

“I don’t need permission to do anything.”

“Right. Because you’re the princess of the Angels of Death.”

“Princess? Okay, what is the Angels of Death? You in a gang?” Marquis asked.

“They’re an all-female covert mercenary organization that uses an all-male security company as a front. Keyword being covert. And although the police may not know your name or background, they know you’re face, and when a member of the Angels of Death’s identity is compromised, they are killed without remorse.”

“Wait, you also got people that can do the same shit you can do tryna kill you?”

Marquis was completely thrown aback by the new information.

“Knowledge of that is restricted to anyone outside the organization. So how do you know that?”

“Don’t you think how I know should be the least of your concerns right now? What matters is that I know. Which should tell you a lot about me if you’re smart like I’m assuming you are. There are two more things that I know as well just from this back and forth we’ve had in this little time. For one, I know that you haven’t thought through anything that you’re doing. At least not thoroughly. And two, I know you’re not in the business of reuniting long lost family members, so, why did you bring him?”

“You’re right. I don’t reunite families. I was going to chop off a limb of his every hour I didn’t have the sword in my possession. Starting with his dick.” Nihari replied.

Marquis quickly shot a bewildering look at Nihari who kept her intimidating gaze on Ezra.

“My limbs starting with my dick? Bro, is ten your only level?”

“I’ll give you kudos for finding me.” Ezra interrupted. “I’ll even give you a gold star for finding him and using him as leverage. You look about the same age as him, so I’m going to guess you’re about twenty-three, no older than twenty-five, but you’re getting involved in something your young mind couldn’t possibly fathom. You’re already in enough trouble as it is. Don’t make it worst for yourself by going further down the rabbit hole.”

Nihari scoffed at Ezra’s claim.

“I was able to find you because I was willing to do what the A.O.D’s weren’t willing to do. It pisses me off that you, this sword, and this whole mission was taken lightly. None of this should have dragged out for so many years. If A.O.D’s did what they were tasked to do, then she wouldn’t have died.”

“Okay. That’s enough. I’m done bro.” Marquis had rose from the couch and began making his way out of the common area towards the front door. “I need to get the hell away from both y’all crazy asses. If you actually have what she needs, then I suggest given it to her. It doesn’t look like it because she’s obviously very attractive, but she knows some kind of voodoo, and she makes a sword appear out of thin air and starts slicin’ niggas. It was nice meeting you Ezra, but we don’t need to see each other ever again bro. I’ve been doing fine without you. Same goes for you Nihari. I’m out.”

Ezra immediately got up from the recliner and stood in front of Marquis’s path.

“Marquis, please, the police are after you. Hang around for a bit and let me help. I’ve made a few reliable friends over the years. Let me make a few calls and see if I can’t smooth all of this over somehow. It’s the least I can do. After that, you won’t see me again.” Ezra said as he....

## Back then...

... awoke soaking wet and face down in the cold muddy sand. He grunted as he turned over onto his back to gaze up at the stars, thanking them for his survival, and as far as he could tell, with only minor injuries. He slowly sat up and wincing as he did so and scanned his surroundings. To his left there was nothing but endless beach, and to his right, the sight of large debris from the downed jet continuing to wash up onto the shore was a clear sign that the crash had happened not too far from the island. When he looked behind him there was a vast and dense jungle that looked as if nothing but darkness awaited him. Ezra had attempted to stand but immediately fell back to his knees due to the pain in his side which he assumed was an indication of broken ribs. But before he could tend to his wounds Ezra was then startled by the sound of someone or something stumbling about in the bushes of the dark jungle. He immediately felt around for some object to protect himself with. He picked up an oddly shaped rock and held it as a weapon to defend himself from whatever was coming. The closer the sound got the more anxious Ezra became and he gripped the rock tighter in his hand, and although the pain from the crash which was affecting his wrist was near excruciating, he held firm to his attack stance. The rustling grew louder and moved closer, and as the black figure exited the thick jungle, Ezra drew his arm back, ready to toss the rock with all his strength until he heard,

“Hol’ up nigga! It’s me!”

Rowland shouted as he exited the jungle holding his side and limping towards Ezra.

Ezra placed the rock down and let out a sigh of relief as he relaxed his shoulders watching Rowland exit the thick jungle.

“You good?” Rowland asked. “You ain’t gon’ stab me with that shit, are you?”

Rowland’s question prompted Ezra to take another look at the rock he picked up to defend himself with. He hadn’t payed any attention to it when he initially grabbed it. He was more concerned about being able to fend off whatever attacker was heading towards him. He was stunned when he realized that it wasn’t just a rock, but a rock beaten into the shape of a spearhead.

“What is you starin’ at?”

“Nothing. I’m good.” Ezra then placed the spearhead in his pocket before Rowland made it over to him.

“Any sign of the other two?” Rowland asked as he looked over at the destroyed wing of the jet that washed up onto the beach.

Ezra turned towards the ocean and sat with his legs stretched.

“No”

“It was only by the grace of God that we survived that shit with no major injuries then.” Rowland said. “And I know you probably think waiting here out in the open is our best chance of getting seen by some passing plane or ship, but—”

“Bruh.” Ezra had cut Rowland off mid-sentence. “Ain’t nobody coming to get us.”

“The hell they ain’t!” The accusation made Rowland’s voice subtly quiver as he spoke. “The police department and whoever they’re in bed with fucked up. Not us. If they would’ve used my jet with my pilot like I paid for, and not some cheap self-piloting bullshit, then Booker and Darrell would still be alive. Yeah, they gotta make this shit right.”

Ezra scoffed at Rowland’s claim.

“So, you honestly think that the Los Angeles police department really gives a shit if four convicts end up dead on a crusade that’s off the books?”

“If they leave us here to die then that’s murder. They not gon’ do that. The media would be all over it. The police department don’t want that smoke.”

“What were the specifics of the deal you made with the public defender?” Ezra asked and still gazing at the moon’s reflection in the water.

“I didn’t have a public defender. My revenue stream doesn’t stop just because I’m doin’ a bid. I have a lawyer on retainer.” Rowland replied.

“Okay, then, what were the specifics of the deal you made with your lawyer that you have on retainer?”

Rowland sighed.

“He said they were gonna fly me and a few other inmates to some island in international waters that the US can’t touch. We’re supposed to investigate some anomaly the government found on their radar. It’s all confidential so no one would have any record of what we’re doing. After we returned with some evidence of whatever it is they found they would reduce our sentences along with no prison time. Just serve out the rest of our time in county. There. Is that what you wanted to know? Same shit in the deal you made.”

“Did he have you sign anything?”

“You real talkative now, ain’tchu?”

“Did he?” Ezra asked once again.

“No. What is the point you’re tryna make because you really startin’ to get on my nerves bruh.”

“Mine didn’t either and I’m sure neither did Booker or Darrell’s. My point is, that they didn’t have us sign anything because they probably anticipated us not coming back.”

“So, you sayin’ they flew us all the way out here to leave us to die? Come on bro, that’s a whole lot of meticulous misleading just to kill some niggas. Don’t you think that’s a little far-fetched?” Rowland asked. “And honestly, I’m sick of talkin’ about it. They comin’ to get us. Case closed.”

Ezra shook his head.

“Well, regardless, we need to find supplies, some kind of shelter, and build a fire.” Ezra suggested as he took his time standing to his feet.

“I went to go take a piss in that dark ass jungle and I swear it felt like somebody was watching me. I don’t trust what’s goin’ on in that muthafucka.” Rowland said.

“We can’t just stay out in the open. We gotta at least get far enough away from the water so we don’t freeze while we in these wet ass clothes.” Ezra said as he made his way towards the dense and dark jungle.

“What about Booker and Darrell? What if they wash up on shore and we ain’t here?” Rowland asked.

“If their bodies ain’t washed up on shore by now I’m sure you know what that means.”

Rowland then took a deep breath and said....

## Right now...

“What do the Angels of Death want with The Dark Blade anyway?” Ezra asked.

“They don’t plan on doing anything with it. Like every other mission we’re just the tool used to eliminate the problem.”

“So, who was it that requested the services?”

“The man whom I’m going to use that damn sword to kill. Colton Phiegore.” Nihari answered.

“Bruh, ten.” Marquis said. “That’s yo only level. Kill Colton Phiegore? Who do you think you are? You said that like you got the keys to his house.”

“Marquis, please. The adults are having a discussion.” Nihari said while keeping her glare aimed at Ezra.

“And this whole time I thought he was allowing the competition to outdo him. Turns out you all were working for him.”

“That doesn’t make any sense. Colton Phiegore is damn near a billionaire. Why would he want an old and used sword when he could buy a million brand new swords?” Marquis questioned.

“I don’t know what his reasons are. They don’t matter to me. He’s still going to die by my hands.” Nihari remarked.

“You’re just gonna kill the most well-known and respected man in Los Angeles for your personal and probably arbitrary reason?” Ezra asked. “This isn’t some tyrant or a dictator enforcing Draconian Law. This city and the entire US are bat shit crazy about him. Do you understand what I’m saying?” You’d not only be putting your life at jeopardy for even attempting, let alone if by some miracle you succeed, but you’d be exposing your secret club of killer women.”

Ezra then reached over, grabbed the glass of water Nihari refused to drink, and took a gulp before he continued.

“I think you should rethink this whole on the quest for blood thing you got going on.”

“I’m not doing it for an arbitrary reason. I have a very good reason actually.” Nihari replied.

“Okay.” Ezra sat the glass down in front of him on the coffee table. “Enlighten me.”

“I actually do wanna know why you dragged me into all of this.” Marquis added.

“I didn’t drag you into anything. Last time I checked I saved your life. And if I wasn’t left off this mission, I could’ve saved hers as well.” She retorted.

“What’re you even talkin’ about? Saved who? Who’s her?” Marquis asked.

“All you need to know is that Colton Phiegore is the reason that a good friend of mine is dead and he’s going to pay for that.” Nihari said. “And I’ll remove any obstacle in my way with extreme prejudice. I don’t care if it’s those damn joke of an android officers, human police, the Angels of Death, either of you, or that damn blind sword wielding asshole.”

Ezra was completely thrown aback by the mention of a blind attacker.

“What blind swordsman?”

“Some nigga who took out the homies lookin’ for me.” Marquis replied as if the encounter was nothing to stress over.

“Why was he looking for you?”

“I don’t know. Something about his employer wanting to speak to me and,” Marquis paused for a few seconds to gather his thoughts and then continued, “He thought I knew where you were. He wanted that damn sword too. Bruh, what the fuck is so special about this damn sword?”

After hearing this, Ezra sighed and dropped his head in shame.

“I failed. I tried and I failed.”

“Failed what? All this shit that has happened to me in a matter of hours is because, it turns out, you ain’t really dead. And I’m lookin’ like a jackass because I thought you actually was. So, it looks like you succeeded to me. Succeeded in fuckin’ my life up in the shortest amount of time.”

“I pray he’s ready.” Ezra had kept his head bowed and began to mumble incoherently.

“What’re you mumbling about?” Nihari asked.

Ezra finished his prayer and looked over at Marquis.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry for everything that’s happened to you because of me.”

“Bruh, apologize after yo friend clears my name with the police.”

“Fair enough.”

“You still didn’t answer me. What were you mumbling?” Nihari demanded.

“Don’t worry. I don’t know any incantations. I was just praying that what I’m about to do will work out.” Ezra took a deep breath and then continued. “Nihari, I’ll make a deal with you. It’s nothing outlandish or weird, it’s more of a favor, but if you accept then the sword is yours.”

Nihari thought for a moment and then answered.

“What deal?”

## Long ago...

“So what’chu do?” Rowland asked Ezra as he pushed the long branches and larger leaves from the tall bushes out of his path.

“What do you mean what did I do?”

“To get locked up and end up in this shit.”

“I stole cars for some people I knew.” Ezra reluctantly answered and continuing to cautiously move forward.

“Oh shit. Who was it you knew? Might be somebody from my crew. Along with other things I got my hands in, I have a little underground exotic car operation too. You might’ve been workin’ for me and didn’t even know it.” Rowland said as he trailed Ezra and having to speed up his strut every few steps, so he did not lose sight of Him in the darkness.

Ezra kept his focus on the dark path ahead of him, moving overgrown plants that obscured his path, and ignored the question.

“I get it. I wouldn’t give away my contacts either.” Rowland said. “But if it’s just gonna be me and you from here on out then we gotta develop some kind of trust and this silent treatment thing is gonna have to cease bro.”

Ezra scoffed at the statement.

“Look, I’ll drop some truth on you right now bro. Get the transparency going. I’m sure you know why I was locked up, everybody in county knows about me, but what I do is the reason why I’m able to afford a lawyer that I can trust. The type of lawyer who’s paid top dollar because he’s a top-of-the-line cutthroat muthafucka who’s the best at what he does. With that being said, I may know a little more in detail about this assignment we all agreed to.”

“Like what?”

“Like how this is considered a forbidden island in the Indian Ocean and it’s apart of the Andaman archipelago. On top of that, supposedly there’s indigenous people here who haven’t even seen a toaster. But what really got me was when he explained that the island used to be 23 square inch miles when it was first discovered in 1880, but three years ago an extra 53 square miles just appeared out of nowhere. And that extra is where the anomaly is located. I also know who the police department is working with. Some rich nigga named Colton Phiegore is funding all this shit. He’s some self-proclaimed up and coming tech mogul from Silicon Valley.”

Ezra then suddenly stopped, causing Rowland to walk face first into his back.

“What is you stoppin’ for?” Rowland questioned as he checked his lip for blood.

“Did you see that?”

“Nigga, I can’t see shit.” Rowland darted back. “I can barely see you. The moment you get a few steps ahead of me, you disappear out of sight.”

“You didn’t see that flicker of light?” Ezra asked while squinting his eyes trying to see as far as ahead as the darkness would allow him.

“Light? We are surrounded by never ending darkness, tall trees, thick ass bushes, and sounds from animals I ain’t never heard before. It doesn’t even feel like we’re walkin’ on solid ground. You buggin’ bruh.”

Ezra kept still for a moment to see if the light would flicker again but there was nothing.

“Yo, how long are we gonna be walkin’? I know we’ve passed up a few places that could’ve served as a resting spot. And also—”

“Shut up.” Ezra whispered and cutting Rowland off.

“What now?”

Both then stood quiet and immediately noticed the sudden eerie silence. The animal howls and hisses had ceased. The sound of the chilling wind blowing through the jungle and swaying the branches of the trees back and forth was all that could be heard.

“Bro, is you good? Did the crash...” Rowland had trailed off after the sudden sound of twigs and branches breaking as if someone or something was approaching.

“Oh shit!” Rowland whispered in a panic. “The fuck was that?”

“I don’t—” Ezra was immediately stopped by the unexpected impaling of an arrow into his thigh.

“FUCK!”

“What happened!? I can’t see!? You good!?” Rowland shouted.

“Just run!”

Ezra shouted back and then sprinting forward as best he could.

Rowland instantly followed suit without question, and both maneuvered through the trees of the dense jungle with as much haste as possible, but neither having a sense of what direction they were headed in. Suddenly, Rowland was nicked by a spear that would’ve lodged itself in his shoulder if he hadn’t stumbled after tripping over a rock.

“Bro! I’m hit!” He shouted as both he and Ezra stumbled and then rolled down a steep hill.

The end of the arrow lodged in Ezra’s thigh had broken and the arrowhead went deeper into his flesh once both Rowland and Ezra face planted hard into the dirt at the bottom of the hill. Rowland hurried to his feet to begin his sprint but was stopped in his tracks by what he witnessed in front of him.

“Bro, are you seein’ this shit?” He asked Ezra with a gaping expression on his face.

Ezra, who stayed lying down for a moment longer than Rowland due to the pain of the arrow, slowly rose to his feet and before setting his sights on what Rowland was speaking of, he looked up the hill to see if they were followed.

“Why’d they stop chasing us?”

Just as he asked the question, Ezra was startled by the sonorous sound of steel clashing. He turned to see the large stone stupas temple that Rowland was staring at. It was surrounded by a swarm of large leather winged creatures circling the top of the temple where he could see two men battling with swords in hand. It was difficult to make out who the men were through the thickness of the swarm, but Ezra recognized that one was a monk by the familiar yellow and burgundy red robes he wore. He was alone in his battle against an opponent that didn’t look human and also having to fend off the winged creatures that all attacked at unpredictable moments. Ezra was in total shock at what he was witnessing. So much so that he had no answer for Rowland when he said....

## At this time...

“Train me? Train me for what?”

Marquis was shocked at the proposal his father made to Nihari.

“As far as I can tell, once you call your friend and he clears my name, shit goes back to normal for me. So, I’m good.”

“Unfortunately, because of all of this, and the choices I’ve made since having this sword, Marquis, as of now, your life will never be normal again. Even if my contact is able to clear your name that would only stop law enforcement from coming after you. There will always be people coming after that sword.”

“What do you mean if he could clear my name? You just said he could.”

“I didn’t say it was a guarantee. I’m still going to see what he can do for you. But you should be prepared for the worst.”

“What do you mean people will never stop coming for the sword?” Nihari asked.

“Colton Phiegore is not the only one to come after the sword. The Dark Blade has been sought after for millenniums. From Attila the Hun to Genghis Khan, to Queen Mary the first, to Adolf Hitler, every power-hungry person who has heard of it has wanted it. I’m just one in the long line of many before me chosen to protect it.” Ezra explained.

“It’s just a sword tho. What is the big deal? Why is it fuckin’ up my life?” Marquis asked.

“It isn’t just a sword. Centuries ago, it was forged in the depths of hell for Orochi the seven headed dragon. He bestowed it with his dark powers and swallowed it to store in his belly. The legend states that, Orochi terrorized ancient villages until he was defeated by a skilled ronin and had all seven heads and his body buried in separate spots around the world. As for the sword, it was given to the ronin as recompense by the villagers. Word of the sword and its evil origins traveled far and wide, and soon, those who wanted to destroy it and those who wanted the sword for themselves came for the ronin. They all fell one by one to the ronin and The Dark Blade, but with each slice to flesh the call of the darkness inside the sword became louder and louder until the ronin came face to face with his own darkness and was defeated. It took the help of the great storm God Susanno to take down the ronin. Susanno then took the sword and handed it over to ancient monks for protection.”

“Look, I’m done bro.” Marquis stood up from the couch. “This shit is all too weird for me. I ain’t about to be apart of any of this. And the audacity that the two of you would even expect me to be. I followed yo crazy ass because I thought I’d get a kick out of your lies, but it turned out to be worst, you were right wit your crazy claims. Then, this nigga actually thinks that after being out of my life for so damn long that I’m just gonna jump when you say? Bruh. Both of you are fuckin’ ridiculous and I’m done bro.” Marquis proceeded out of the living room and with no push back from Ezra nor Nihari. “If I run into either of you two fifty years from now it would be too damn soon.” Marquis said as he exited and slamming the door behind him to make sure that Ezra and Nihari could here that he had gone.

“You just gon’ let him go?” Nihari asked.

“I was about to ask you the same question.”

“I already said that I would protect the sword, after I kill Colton Phiegore. Marquis being here or not doesn’t concern me anymore. I just thought you’d wanna get to know your son.”

“You forgot already?”

“Forgot what?”

“You have to help me train him before I give you anything.” Ezra reminded her.

Nihari kissed her teeth.

“Are you being for real? I thought you were bullshittin’. He wouldn’t last two days under the intense training that I had to endure. He’s too weak and he lacks resolve.”

“Be that as it may, I still need your help. Whether he wants to accept it or not, he’s a part of this. And if he can’t defend himself against what’s coming then I would’ve done all this for nothing.”

Nihari sighed.

“You want me to go get him then?”

“No, we’ll let him be for now. I can only imagine what’s goin through his head.”