A Brothers Rites

"Are you ready, Initiate Clayton?"

The recruit's eyes snapped to attention. He had been meditating in an attempt to calm his nerves ahead of this day. His superiors had told him a true Brother in the Chapter of Light would know no such thing as fear, but how was that even close to achievable with the milestone that he would attain today? He was due to receive his chapter rites, to embrace the magical enchantments of their highest priestesses. To finally call himself a Brother.

Ten long years Clayton had waited for this day, and the reality of his achievements had finally begun to settle in. To the world at large, he was another soldier among the ranks of the strongest troop of human warriors the world had ever seen. To Clayton, he had finally surpassed the countless trials and encounters that sought to break him, to have his family name carved into history with the highest denomination of honor. He broke his stillness, looking to the extravagantly decorated priestess, and nodded firmly.

The grand chapel doors creaked open with immense force as he stood to attention. If it were not for the illumination from the Brothers and Sisters, with their unmistakable armour casting its warm radiance throughout the halls, it would be pitch black inside; Clayton thought this was a fitting metaphor for the darkness that surrounds the world, as the role of the Chapter of Light was more important now than it had ever been before. Each step he took echoed, with all eyes on him as he entered the silent chambers where he would fulfill his destiny.

It felt as if it were the longest walk Clayton had ever taken, his heart racing as he took deep, long breaths in an attempt to calm himself. The focal point of the scene was an altar in the center, surrounded by three High Priestesses and Elder Donovan, standing motionless while they awaited the recruit's approach. Clayton returned the gaze of the Elder as he arrived, the silence being broken by the old Priest's wisened, commanding voice.

"Initiate. Please remove your training armour."

As humbly as he could, the recruit took off his weighted gear, feeling as if an immense burden was being lifted from his shoulders. He passed it to the Priestess who had guided him into the room, exchanging a bow of gratitude with her as she carried away his beaten clothing into the darkness. He turned to face his Elder once again.

"Please lay on top of the altar."

Clayton gave his formal bow once again, forcing his stiff, frozen body to take those steps, sitting on the altar and contemplating his life for a few short moments, staring up at the intricately detailed mural that adorned the roof of the Grand Chapel. He closed his eyes, just for a moment, as he remembered how far he had come from his younger days, thinking about how his mother must be at this moment. She would be right there with him if she could, encouraging him every step of the way like she always had before, Clayton thought to himself, a pure smile forming momentarily before he returned to his serious demeanour. Lifting his legs, he shifted on top of the cold stone, laying down flat as he had been taught to, while the door he had entered through forced their way open once again. All in attendance other than him turned their attention to it, as loud, heavy footsteps emerged from the silence as the Elder addressed them.

"Grand Justicar Valdorian. It is an honor to have you with us, as always."

The recruit's heart skipped a beat. Grand Justicar Valdorian? The Valdorian? Nobody had informed him that he would be personally making an appearance... No one had prepared him for this. Yet even in the presence of such a legendary influence, Clayton calmed himself, not moving an inch. Even though he could feel the almost palpable warmth emitting from the Grand Justicar's fabled armour, he must had to remain focused.

One of the High Priestesses stepped aside graciously, allowing Valdorian to approach the altar, looking down to the recruit as they met eye to eye. The Grand Justicar looked much older than the legends told of him, yet his purity of heart and spirit were apparent at even a glance. And his armour... his armour could only be described as incredible in its looks. Adorned on all corners, all surfaces by dazzling iconography, it emanated the sheer power of the sun even in its inactive state. Was this even its inactive state? Clayton could not truly tell, with only fables of the man that donned this armour as his reference. Its design seemed to show the entire story of the light itself, from the great creation of the universe to the numerous forces that threatened to destroy everything it stood for.

"Greetings, Initiate. Today is the day you shall be brother in more than just name. Are you prepared to join forces with the light, to protect the family you care about, new and old, and cast away your old life in the name of the Sun?"

Hearing the Grand Justicar call him directly sent chills down the recruit's spine even with the warmth that surrounded him. Valdorian did not speak down to him, like he was a mere soldier, or that he was beneath him, even though by all means he was. He spoke to him like a father would. A father Clayton never had. But now was not the time to dwell on such a matter. The recruit knew he must not hesitate or even consider turning back, now.

"Yes, Grand Justicar. I shall give my all, body and soul, in

the name of the Light."

Valdorian closed his eyes, putting a hand on Clayton's shoulder, starting to murmur incantations in the language the Initiate had studied for so long... And yet still the words were unfamiliar to him. The Grand Justicar's voice began to have what could only be described as a divine element to it, speaking powerfully regardless of his hushed tone, with bright yellow light beginning to flood the depths of the chapel's shadows, pouring in as if it were a mist. The Initiate began to feel limitless, unending energy channel through his shoulder, tensing his body up as his nerves began to strike again, the reverberations of Valdoriantouch echoed throughout his entire body in a most uncomfortable sensation. Clayton still did his best to not move, as he dares not risk jeopardizing the entire ritual. The High Priestesses joined the Grand Justicar in on the chanting, their voices acting as a chorus, deafening out any other noise until it was the only thing that could be heard by the Initiate.

Then, there was a twitch in Clayton's right leg. Involuntarily, the energy coursing through his body had started to make him shift through reflex, as he forced his eyes shut in an attempt to regain control of his body. I can't give in. I have to see this through. There is no turning back for me, now. The pain followed shortly after, as if nerves across his body had burst, his vision fading into blackness as he yelled out in agony.

"Mother... I am scared."

The small boy had stopped in his tracks, halfway between the Chapter of Light's recruiter and his mother. The vision was a familiar one, that of the day Clayton surpassed the trial and defined his fate as a Brother. It had been gruelling, a series of non-lethal combat against other boys from his village in a competition of strength. They were well known across the land, particularly for the harshness of the recruiters, who were only interested in the very best. One could pass the trial of combat and still be denied even a glance from being deemed unfit to serve the Chapter, and yet Clayton had been accepted into a final trial: To best the Recruiter themselves in unarmed combat. The look on his mother was one the boy had never been able to forget, a frail, serene grace... One that reminded him of what he was fighting for, why he had pushed himself all those years for this day to come. Without as much of a word back, the Initiate clenched his fists with resolve.

The Recruiter stared back at the boy's fiery, fierce glare of determination, and gave a light smile. The village onlookers, comprised of Clayton's friends and family, were utterly silent as the two faced each other down. The silence lasted for nearly a minute as the boy and the Recruiter sized each other up, before the ferocious battle cry of the child echoed throughout, charging directly to his target.

"Initiate, you must withstand the pain. Stay with us." A High Priestess called out, snapping the Initiate back to his surroundings in the chapel. The pain was immense as

Clayton struggled to keep his mouth shut and stop the screaming, his entire body tensing and on the verge of convulsing. It took every ounce of might in his body to resist the toll being put on his body, and yet the Grand Justicar had barely moved an inch from the start. It was as if he was no longer in the room with them, not a single movement of the Initiate's affecting him in the slightest. Despite this, the intensity of the pain every inch of his body was returning to him was threatening to engulf Clayton entirely, gripping onto the altar as hard as he could, starting to feel his consciousness fade again despite the bright radiance shining down upon him from every angle.

"I know you're not done yet, Clayton. Come on, get back up!" A voice called out from the depths of the Initiate's mind, unmistakable and one that had been missing for a long time. His mind and vision was taken back to the Chapter's training grounds outside of this very chapel, four years ago. It had been at least two years since he last saw his mother by now, and combined with the physical exertion demanded by the Chapter in training, had started to overcome him, laying down in the grass as other recruits charged back and forth through the many obstacles presented to them. Clayton was forcibly pulled up by his friend, who looked angry that he was on the brink of giving up. "You didn't come this far in your life to run back home to your mother, Clayton. Why are you giving up? You don't have the right to!" Being placed on his feet, Clayton staggered around somewhat in a daze, being held up while an instructor barked orders at them from the sidelines.

"You two! Get back to the course, now!"

The two teenagers exchanged glances with each other, Clayton being firmly pat on the back by his friend while he had stayed speechless himself the entire time. "Come on. It's time to go."

The blinding light of the Chapel's interior had finally began to simmer down as the Initiate's vision returned to the forefront. The chanting had stopped and the pain had began to turn into numbness, the Grand Justicar taking his hand off of Clayton and standing tall. There was silence for a few moments, as the Initiate took in the sheer sense of power he had never experienced before with his every slight movement. The Elder moved out of sight again, as Valdorian looked down upon him and commanded;

"Rise, Initiate Clayton." No moment was spared upon hearing those words, as the Initiate quickly got off of the altar and took a knee in front of the Grand Justicar. "As of today, you are an initiate no longer. You have displayed the virtues that the Chapter of Light requires in these dark times. The courage to do what must be done for the good of our world. The strength to enact it. And the wisdom to know when to act. You now join our ranks as a true Brother of the Light."

Elder Donovan returned from the once-illuminated shadows, bringing with him the gold coloured armour that

was signature to all combatants of the Chapter of Light. He laid it down upon the altar and bowed to the newly made Brother, who reached out with his hand towards it, feeling the radiance in his very fingertips. He was one with the light, and was ready to use it to enact the justice their world needed.

The End