

Epilogue

It was dark.

A darkness that swallowed all: thought, sense, time... and left a sole burning flame.

A white flame.

She couldn't harness the power to raise her limb to grasp it—so beautiful! And it seemed to speak to her! To see her through amber eyes....

It was dark.

But she held close to the white flame and was not afraid.

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Zackary Regal crafted the finishing touches on the lead story for that evening's broadcast when his intercom demanded his attention. "Speak."

"There's an SO Beita here for you, sir."

Both eyebrows raced toward his hairline. "Send him in."

"Will do."

Zack kicked back from his desk and leaned back, lacing his hands behind his head as the Garden officer let himself into the office and closed the door securely behind him. "Have a seat."

"I'll stand, sir." In fact, SO Beita stood very nearly at attention, his expression stoic—at best.

"I accept your offer, sir. I'm reporting for duty."

"So I see. All approved by Commander Squall and First-Lt. Rokhart?"

SO Beita seemed to bristle at that, and all he offered in response was a brusque nod.

"How about I call just to make certain you didn't go and do something stupid." Zack sat forward and pressed the intercom button on the phone. "Ronda, would you mind dialing Balamb Garden. Ask for the details of SO Beita's assignment. I want to make certain I don't

use him how I oughtn't."

"Yes, sir."

He rang off. SO Beita didn't blink. Once again, Zack sat back and regarded the man. "I would take you at your word, Beita, but having my sister sitting at home now.... Well, it gives me cause to wonder on your motivations behind the transfer. You understand." When SO Beita still made no reply or reaction, he cocked his head. "You do, don't you? Or am I off base?"

"Your base is your own, sir. I'm here to do a duty. Anything else is my concern." With that, the man turned and made for the exit.

Zack stood and cut him off at the door. "My sister is trying to put her life back together, Beita. I would appreciate it if you kept your distance until she's done that."

Again, no reaction.

"Don't make me ask your commander to put that in order format."

A jaw muscle twitched. "Sir, your sister has a choice. Once she makes it, you better stay the hell out of my way."

With that, he pushed past and exited the office and the station. Zack stared after him, arms crossed as he pondered the possibilities. Then he shrugged and decided to leave destiny alone. She would do what she would do.

And so would Sally.