

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL -- EVENING

KAIA (22), lithe and deadly, drops silently off a rocky shelf to the brush below. VINCE (38), compact and powerful, drops in behind her, followed by BUZZARD (26), lanky and tall. All are in light combat armor, black as the shadows forming around them. They appear unarmed. KAIA leads off, blindfolded, her sure footsteps guiding them unerringly into the trees. VINCE and BUZZARD flank her, eyes everywhere else.

VINCE

Do we have a course?

KAIA

I'm looking, Vince, geez! Give me a minute. Can't believe I'm running at night with this on.

BUZZARD

You call this running, novice? Find us a course.

KAIA

Yeah, yeah, keep your shorts on, Buzz Bomb. Almost have it.

KAIA'S P.O.V. - CONTINUOUS

Kaia's "radar view" elevates and moves beyond the running triad, panning, then zooming forward to a camp of a dozen humanoid silhouettes. There are several outlying patrollers.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - CONTINUOUS

BUZZARD

I still say she's not right for this, Vincent. We should break off...

KAIA

I got it.

VINCE, glowering, just runs.

BUZZARD

You have nothing.

KAIA wheels around and stops BUZZARD dead in his tracks. VINCE stops reluctantly, still scanning for threats, but not missing a word.

KAIA

I said, I've got them. Are we gonna do some protecting tonight?

(MORE)

KAIA (CONT'D)

Or are you just gonna fret yourself
into a seizure?

VINCE

Kaia.

The warning is unmistakable.

KAIA

Vince.

As is the lack of concern

BUZZARD

This is not going to work, Vince.
She can barely hold an image, and
she can't keep her mouth shut.

KAIA

Oh I get it, Buzz. For all your
people talk of leadership and respect,
you really prefer your women soft-
spoken!

VINCE

Kaia...

KAIA

For Fury's sake, Vince, what!

BUZZARD

I've pledged from my youth to live
and die at a Sensor's command! You
dare accuse me...

KAIA

And I've spent my life among men who
would make goddesses of us all, so
long as we kept our place!

VINCE

Both of you, bridle your tongues!

Too loud. A startled animal leaps unseen through the nearby
brush. Vince quickly regains control, if not composure.

VINCE (CONT'D)

We are within arms reach of a deadly
enemy, and you quarrel like an old
bondcouple. Prodigy or no, she will
need more than your anger to learn
our ways and there is no time. If
there is a problem, state it plainly.

Now uncomfortable, BUZZARD holds his tongue, studying his feet, the trees, looking everywhere but at her.

VINCE (CONT'D)

Well? Nothing worth speaking after all that? Poor excuse for a clumsy approach, but I suppose...

BUZZARD

Tell him why you leave the school each evening, Kaia.

KAIA is paralyzed, stunned.

KAIA

What? How..

BUZZARD looks at her now, intently, desperately. Pleading.

BUZZARD

Truth, Kaia. Truth like water. Before another word escapes your lips, decide if you would lead us.

VINCE

Buzz, no! She's not ready to answer that call.

BUZZARD

Maybe, Vince, but I'll have her answer tonight. Before I take one step further at her command. Can there be truth between us, Kaia?

KAIA

This is insane! You had me trapped for weeks in those holes you call a school. So what if I went out a couple times?

BUZZARD

Your class proctor saw you meet with someone. She thinks it was a Citadel agent.

KAIA

Vara said that? And you believed it? She's hated me from the first! Now she's following me around at night, making up shadow agents! She'll be calling me their leader next!

BUZZARD

So you did leave the school.

KAIA

I never said that! I'm just saying that Vara hates me and...

BUZZARD

And what? Would lie to hurt you?

VINCE

Buzz, that's enough. She was not raised like us. We must teach her...

BUZZARD

Nothing, Vince! This isn't about lessons. She'll be the most powerful Sensor in an age. Yet she is infuriating, self-absorbed, childish, and, and...

Magnificent.

VINCE

And what, Buzz? You must be as water too, if we are to salvage anything from this night.

BUZZARD

She just needs to choose.

KAIA

Choose what? Why can't you guys just talk? You are all "truth" this and "water" that and the one thing you won't do is speak plainly!

Vince barely seems to hear, studying BUZZARD's face anew. Can't believe he missed this, but it will have to wait.

VINCE

Kaia, please. At your novice trial, Vara had you beat, completely. Do you remember the moment at the end when that all changed?

Kaia takes her time with this curveball.

KAIA

Yes.

VINCE

You were blind, then you saw.

KAIA

Yes.

VINCE

When that change came, was it like
rain that fell upon you, or was it a
cup that you drank from?

Kaia becomes more and more subdued, almost entranced.

KAIA

I drank it.

As if I had been in a desert my whole life.

VINCE

And when you chose, Kaia, when you
chose to see, it was like..

KAIA

Like knowing exactly what was, and
from that, what would come next.

Hope dawning, brilliant and fearsome, of...what? a home?

VINCE

Exactly! Our lives are not events,
novice, but choices. If you would
fight with us and live among us,
truth is the only currency you can
bring. It is our only treasure.
But truth isn't like the rain, Kaia.
It doesn't just happen. It is a cup
you must choose to drink from.

BUZZARD

Kaia, please. Forget the lies they
gave you to tell. Who have you been
meeting with?

KAIA searches for an answer, oblivious to the HUMMING from
above that rapidly raises in pitch, followed by a PULSE that
scatters trees and blows the group off their feet.