

I will not die

Von Aqua111

Spectre climbed up a small path to the top of a hill at the edge of Angel Island. He could see the ocean on Mobius Prime and if he turned around he had a good view over the Island. During his childhood he often came here. But now he hadn't returned to it for decades. It had a reason – the child Spectre only came here when everything just was too much for him to bear, when he only wanted to flee from his own life. And from his father, or better said Moritori who he thought to be his father.

He barely could remember anything from the time it all started. Back then he still was a toddler, not even two years of age. The rapid change in his father's personality, his grandmother's death, his grandfather leaving - it all was just blurry memories. At least he still had his mother. She was still there for him though her health became worse each day. And then when he was about six of age the first thing to leave a deep cut in his soul happened.

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"Your mother is dead."

Those were the words Spectre was greeted one morning. There was no sign of sadness in Tobor's voice - just words, a fact that he had felt to tell. The young Guardian froze in shock.

"She is... dead?" he could only whisper.

"Yes, she died during the night. I already got everything done. And now I have to leave. There's some work to do on Mobius Prime."

With that his father left the room. Spectre remained frozen in the same position until the words had the chance to fully sink in. Dead ... his mother was dead ... the only Echidna in his life he could turn to was gone ... and all his father cared about was his work. Now tears were welling up his eyes, ran down his cheeks.

"Hey, you want to be a Guardian one day?"

The harshness in Tobor's voice startled him. Spectre turned around to face his father who had just come back and now stood there with crossed arms then he slowly nodded.

"Then stop crying like a little wimp. Tears are for the weak. Besides it's time for you to learn how to be on your own. Your mother's death and my absence will be the perfect training for you."

"But ... I'm only six ... and I haven't yet learned how to use any Guardian abilities..."

"And what difference does that make? The earlier you learn to be on your own the better and if you learn everything by yourself it will be more effective than watching

someone else showing you how to do it."

Without a further word he left the room again to continue his preparations. Spectre remained where he was and fought the urge to cry again. More than anything else he wanted to be a strong Guardian but after his mother's death, after his world just shattered into pieces and his father's harsh and cold words it was hard to fight back the tears.

Minutes later he heard how a door was slammed shut. His father had left and hadn't even said goodbye. And now nothing could hold Spectre in this house anymore as well. He ran, didn't know where he was going and soon also didn't know anymore where he was, just wanted to get away. The road now led up and soon the young Guardian found himself on the top of a hill at the edge of Angel Island, Mobius Prime hundreds of meters below. There he finally sunk to his knees and cried.

When he had no tears left anymore and only dry sobs came over his lips the thoughts in his head started racing.

His mother was gone - and he had no chance for a last goodbye. He didn't even know where her grave was. His dad didn't seem to care at all and seemed as cold as always, if not colder. And now he had left as well, had left Spectre all on his own for who knows how long. What should he do now? Where should he go? How was he supposed to survive? He didn't want to go home anymore. Not after the last bit of love and caring had faded away that night. And not as long as it meant to meet Tobor there again sooner or later.

'It is not him', a little voice inside of him said. 'It was the Dark Legion's fault why he had become like that. Without them you still would have a loving father.'

Slowly Spectre stood up. His mind was set. He would become the strongest Guardian ever and take revenge on the Legion for what they had done to his father. He would make his dad proud. Vigorously he wiped his wet cheeks. Crying was for weaklings.

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'During those days Moritori was gone I learned how to survive on my own quite well', Spectre thought, 'Maybe I should have stayed away. It would have prevented me from even more slashes through my young soul. And a few ... enhancements of shame.'

He touched his helmet but then let his hands sink down again. No, he wouldn't take it off. He knew what he tried to hide under it and there was no reason to show it right now.

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When he came back home this day Spectre found the door unlocked. He heard voices inside - one of them very well known.

"Dad? Are you back again?"

He recoiled at the sight of Tobor's two visitors. Why would his father invite two of the creatures who once had harmed him?

"Those are Dark Legionnaires..."

"Oh don't worry", Tobor said with a sneer. "They have given up working for the Legion long time ago and now are living in Echidnaopolis. But you are coming right in time. We just were talking about you." He waved Spectre to come closer and the young Guardian did so though reluctantly and with sceptic looks at the two Legionnaires who showed the same snarky grin as his father.

"You still want to be a Guardian?"

Spectre nodded and Tobor continued, "Well, I have decided to start your training but before I still want to make a little test with you."

The boy's heart started beating faster. His father really would train him to become a Guardian. And he would do everything to make him proud of his son.

"I'm ready."

The ice cold smile on Tobor's face grew bigger. "Good... As you know Guardians have to go through a lot of fights and thus have a lot of pain to bear. I want to see how much pain *you* can stand."

He nodded to the Legionnaires and suddenly they were at Spectre's sides and held his arms in a tight grip. The young Guardian tried to struggle free.

"Hold still", Tobor harshly commanded and Spectre froze in his moves. "They will just prevent you from moving too much for this will only make it worse."

He walked behind the boy and suddenly Spectre felt fear. He had no clue what would follow but something inside him told him it was something bad and he only wanted to get away. And then a sharp pain shot through one of his spines. He screamed and fought to get free again. Something wet dripped down his back. He felt Chaos energy rushing through his veins but he didn't know how to set it free. Each wave of pain was stronger than the previous one and then ... darkness.

When Spectre opened his eyes he was alone. They had just left him lying there on the floor. He tried to sit up but his head felt unusually heavy - his spines were dragging him down. He let a hand wander over them then he sank back down to the floor. Some of his spines had been cut off and replaced by cybernetics...

*On the ground I lay  
Motionless in pain  
I can see my life  
Flashing before my eyes  
Did I fall asleep  
Is this all a dream  
Wake me up  
I'm living a nightmare*

Once more he felt the tears welling up but this time he choked them back. If he already had blacked out because of the pain like a little girl he at least didn't want to cry like one.

Why had his father allowed something like that to happen? He now looked like one of the hated Legionnaires.

Steps were coming closer and only seconds later his father came in.

"Good to see you awake. I was already afraid I had gone a little too far for a beginning." But he didn't sound as if he had been worried at all.

"Why?" Spectre asked when he finally managed to sit up. "Why have you done this to me?" His voice was calm but it needed a lot of self control to ban the shiver from it.

"Because I wanted to prevent you from bleeding to death. Not all technology is bad." He pointed at his visor. "This prevented me from going blind and these helped you to stay alive." He sneered when he added, "But if you don't like them, go and hide them

like a Dark Legionnaire would."

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That was the time Spectre started to hide his cybernetics away but not because he wanted to look like a Legionnaire - rather because he believed a Legionnaire would wear them with pride. Only a Guardian would hide them away in shame. First he started with hooded clothes but only a few years passed until he wore helmets. The hooded clothes made him look like a hoodlum, the helmets like a warrior.

At least Moritori had kept his word and started to train him. Legionnaire training wasn't that much different from Guardian training. He only needed to replace the shotguns by pure Chaos force. But later when Spectre was just able to use the basic Chaos abilities he did more to him than only a normal training. Not only did he want to make a Legionnaire out of the young Spectre - he also had wanted him to become a real threat to the Guardians.

When Locke had started the experiments on himself and his unborn son Spectre had been the only one to voice his vehement disagreements. And he had a reason for them. Nearly the same had been done to him in his youth. But while Knuckles had a loving father who made sure everything worked fine and didn't want to harm his son, Spectre had Moritori - a Dark Legion Overlord who did experiments on a young Guardian, someone he could just throw away without shedding a tear in case his experiments went wrong.

And yes, some of them did.

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Needles pierced through his skin, tubes and wires on his body and being connected to the Master Emerald that way - it already was completely normal to Spectre. His father did this on a nearly daily basis. He had explained it would help him to become one of the mightiest Guardians ever, maybe even as strong as the great Steppenwolf - well, unless Hawking Tobor never had used the word "great" in combination with the name Steppenwolf but Spectre still thought of him that way for it somehow had become a Guardian tradition. But while it was great to feel the Chaos force inside him grow stronger very fast day by day he still knew it was wrong. No Guardian should handle the Master Emerald that way.

His hard training alone already had made him very skilled for his age, he always had pushed himself beyond his limits to make his father proud and when all he got in return was either ignorance or false praise he worked even harder the next time. But Tobor wanted to see him even stronger so he started with experiments.

The same procedure nearly every day - Spectre was pumped with energy while his father watched over the electronics and increased the dose of Chaos energy bit by bit. But something was different today. The might of the Master Emerald should only tingle under his skin, not sting and burn.

"Father, are you sure everything is right?" he called, "I think the dose is too high. It hurts."

Either Tobor hadn't understood him or he misunderstood him on purpose because he turned a few knobs and an even greater amount of energy rushed through Spectre's

body. The boy cried out in pain.

"This is ... too much! Turn it down!"

"Not right now", Tobor said and the young Guardian was sure he heard a bit of malevolence in his voice. "I want to see how far I can go without destroying you."

"Destroying?" Spectre brought out through his gritted teeth. This sounded as if his father only saw him as some kind of *thing*, not as person.

The next wave of pain would have brought him to his knees if the source of energy had been something other than the Master Emerald. Instead it ripped him from his feet, lifted him off the ground. He now was levitating right over the Emerald. The pain was nearly driving him insane and still Tobor increased the dose until... Spectre screamed when Chaos energy erupted from his body. Wires were ripped away from him, machines burst, even part of the cave above him rained down and he was hit by shrapnels and flying boulders. When the energy faded he dropped down to the floor. He squirmed and almost passed out with pain but this time he fought to stay conscious. Fainting was for sissies - he had to learn how to deal with pain.

He was picked up - somehow Tobor had managed to find cover and withstand everything nearly unharmed - and carried out of the cave.

"You have some severe burns and a lot of cuts. But I can take care of them. Just hold on."

Spectre's sight was already too blurry but he guessed he was carried home and then he felt how he was put down on a bed.

"This might sting a bit."

'Sting' was far understated. It felt as if he was skinned but Spectre was able to suppress his cries of pain and only a silent whimper came over his lips.

"And now lie still so it can heal faster", Tobor said after a while, "I already have come too far to give up on you now."

These words were like a knife through Spectre's heart and almost hurt him more than the Emerald or the shrapnels had - he was lying there in pain and his father only cared about the progress of his experiments. There was a lump in his throat but once again he choked down his tears, didn't even cry when his father left and he was all alone again.

*On this bed I lay  
Losing everything  
I can see my life  
Passing me by  
Was it all too much  
Or just not enough  
Wake me up  
I'm living a nightmare*

For hours he had remained on this bed, blankly staring into the twilight of the late afternoon and later into the darkness. As soon as he had been able to move his head again he had found out what his father had done to "help him heal". Part of the skin on his hip and his legs where the burns had been the worst had been replaced by a metal skin. He now looked even more like the hated Legionnaires. It was making him sick - not just his situation but also this place. Normally he only spent the evenings at

his favourite place on the hill, away from home and his father and returned for the night but right now he didn't even want to remain there for the night.

Slowly he stood up and walked through the silent rooms. Before the large mirror on the corridor he stopped. A little Legionnaire was staring back at him. Aside of the cybernetics the experiments also had caused other changes on him. He didn't bother too much about his nearly black fur - it already had been of a very dark red before and it wasn't unusual that fur darkened even more over the years. But the colour of his eyes wasn't normal. The blue had slowly faded away during the last few days and now red was shining through - like the eyes of an albino.

He turned his face away, left the house and continued his slow march to the hill where he would spend his night.

"You are late", where the first words he heard when he returned home in the late morning. No questions where he had been or how he felt today, not the slightest hint of worry in Tobor's voice. Everything was just as usual.

"I think you also should see the people you are meant to protect so we will pay the city a visit."

"W-what?" Spectre stuttered, "But I ... I can't ... not with ..."

Not for anything in the world he wanted to be seen with these cybernetics.

"But I don't want people to see you with these wounds. They can see the cybernetics once the rest around them has healed but for now put that on."

He tossed the boy something grey that looked awfully lot like a Dark Legion robe but Spectre still put it on. Everything was better than showing his cybernetic parts at the moment.

People stared at him. He felt their gazes even when he didn't see them. Of course they did. He looked like a little Legionnaire after all and the only thing that told them he wasn't was the fact that he was with the Guardian Tobor and thus had to be his son.

"Will we visit grandfather as well?" he asked.

He hoped for it. Hawking was the last family member he knew who still wore the love his father so completely lacked in his heart but unfortunately he hadn't seen him anymore for years.

"Maybe, if he crosses our way", Tobor said absent minded, "I have no clue where he lives at the moment. And actually I don't even care."

He stopped at the central square and turned around.

"Look at them. Aren't they pathetic?" he said. "One might think they have learned something from the past wars. But no, they are still running around completely unprepared, unarmed and fully rely on the protection of the Guardians. They put the whole weight on our shoulders and wouldn't even have a backup plan if we fail. And have you seen how they stared at us? Sure, we are the Guardians; we are something special, some kind of royalty. And because we are special we can never be part of them. Even if we were the saviours of the world - we still would be pariahs."

So far Spectre had watched his father's speech in surprise, wondering what he was driving at but he would never have awaited what he said next.

"I think the Dark Legion isn't such a bad place after all. As long as you follow the Grandmaster's orders you will be accepted no matter what you are." Tobor sighed and turned around again. "Come on. This city is making me sick. The faster we are out of here the better."

The young Guardian couldn't help but stare at his father. How could he say something like that? He slowly shook his head in disbelief.

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On the hill the grown up Spectre shook his head as well. Had Moritori really believed he could change his wish to become a Guardian and awaited he would join the Dark Legion now instead? But even though his life didn't flip 180 after it - the speech still left some traces behind. Doubt about the people he was meant to protect, doubt about the Guardians and even himself.

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It had been half a day ago since Spectre had seen his father disappear into the Forbidden Zone. It meant that he wouldn't meet him again until many years later, that he was finally free. But still he didn't feel too much happiness. All he had done so far had been standing on the hill, watching the ocean underneath the island.

Nearly all his short life he either had experienced mistreatment or had been stared at like a pariah. He had nothing where he belonged to - not to the people of Echidnaopolis because he was a Guardian, not the Guardians for his father had made sure he looked like a damn Legionnaire, not the Dark Legion because he had been born to the house of Edmund. And what should he even fight for? The people who mistrusted him for his looks? The Guardians who probably would accept him even less?

He closed his eyes. For a few minutes he just concentrated on the wind in his face and the smell of the salt-sea air. The ocean was lying deep below - no one would survive a fall from that height... Thanks to his cybernetics he couldn't glide and the Emerald wouldn't catch him if he didn't want to... He took a few deep breaths. But then he took one step back, a bit further away from the edge. No, that wasn't how he wanted to end. And even if he had to stay forever on this hill pondering about his purpose in life - he would not die, not now.

A sound behind him caught his attention. He quickly turned around ready for attack or defence but he relaxed a bit when he saw a Fire Ant.

The Ant stared at him for a few seconds then he asked, "Are you Spectre? You sure have changed a lot since I last have seen you, my boy."

Spectre knew what impression he must have made - the dark grey cloak of a Legionnaire, a helmet, black fur instead of dark red and red eyes where once blue had been - a freak where a Guardian should have been.

"Yes, I am", he silently said, nearly feeling ashamed for it. But then he pulled himself together and asked a bit louder, "And who are you?"

"The name's Semper Fidelis, Deo Volente's son. I'm sure you know him for he was your grandfather's and father's mentor once. And now I had been sent to be your new mentor."

"I already had been trained by my father for a few years. Is there even anything I could still learn? I thought I already had been quite good."

"Quite good? Boy, I have watched your training a few times and you are better than any Guardian at your age should be. I bet one day you could even equal the great Steppenwolf."

Spectre shot him a suspicious look. He had already heard enough false praise. But he

only saw Semper's honest smile. The first real compliment the young Guardian had been given in years. The corners of his mouth twitched when he tried to smile.

"You might only have to correct a few little things", Semper continued, "Nothing grave but I noticed that your father ... uhm, well, he didn't seem to be too good in giving critique or advice. With my help you could improve even more. Furthermore you are still lacking experience, you never had to defend yourself against real enemies, never lead your people through times of crisis, never had been to Mobius Prime. You still have to see and learn so much more until you can call yourself a real Guardian."

"But ... will they even accept me in Haven?" Spectre now voiced one of his biggest fears.

Semper slightly chuckled. "I would think the Brotherhood has gone insane if they refuse to accept you of all Guardians. But you aren't the first one who's afraid of failing. Many other young Guardians were - even Steppenwolf himself sometimes had his doubts if he could make it through all the tasks lying in front of him."

For some time they just stood and looked at each other. The Fire Ant seemed to wait if Spectre had any further questions but since the Echidna remained silent he finally said, "We still have a few hours until it gets dark. I would suggest we go to the training area today so you can show me what you've learned and I can tell you if there's still something you could improve."

He turned around and walked a few steps down the hill then stopped and looked over his shoulder with a smile.

"What are you waiting for, young warrior? Come."

For a few seconds Spectre still hesitated but then he followed Semper. He had nothing to lose after all. Little did he know that those few steps down the path were the first few steps into a new life.

*I will not die  
I'll wait here for you  
I feel alive  
When you're beside me  
I will not die  
I'll wait here for you  
In my time of dying*

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Spectre turned around and looked back at the path. Over one and a half centuries ago a boy who had lost his hope and whose dreams had nearly been beaten out of him had left. He had learned to go his own way, to value his life, had been through many battles, had found out the truth about his father. And today he had returned - as a fighter.