

ANIL'S DANCE

“Straighten your back.”

Her hands glide along your spine, coaxing you to adjust your posture as she holds your right hand high, pressing your body firmly to hers. Her steps are slow, instructing you to move as she does. Her heels echo across the empty ballroom, muting the sounds of your steps.

She moves in a patterned circle, guiding you along with each sweep of both of your arms, with each sway of her hips, stepping back from you, and walking you around her until you are directly behind. Her touch is firm but gentle as her fingers slip from your grasp, kicking her foot out and stepping around to fully face you. Opening her arms and slightly instructing you to step forward and meet her. Your right hand returns to her left, while your left moves to her upper arm, and her hand goes to your waist. She rocks you back, dipping slightly as her right-hand glides from your waist and across your back to your left arm and raises it. Letting you rest a portion of your weight on her.

There is no music.

You stare at the woman before you. Her face is neutral, far more focused on guiding while letting you simply dance. You can't tell if she's enjoying herself, even though she was asked to dance. You blink, glancing down at your feet, only to feel the commander squeeze your hand, wordlessly instructing you to lift your head. She looks through you, making eye contact, yet you can feel her gaze.

She isn't instructing a formal dance. She steps away, guiding you out under her left arm to walk in a controlled circle and when you make your way around, she easily catches you, stepping back. “You're staring.” Her voice draws you out of your thoughts and your eyes widen for a moment. She's looking at you directly, black eyes staring at you. Not through you.

“You're really focused.” You speak calmly.

“I am.”

Her words are blunt, continuing the dance. Silence settles over you both. She steps forward, hand gliding to your waist and pressing your body close forcing out a 'hmpf' from your lips. Unprepared for the sudden movement. "... I didn't think you'd enjoy dancing." She falls for a moment, as you both step back as she this time walks around you, pausing once she's directly behind.

"I don't." Her hand covers your left hand, dragging the tips of her nails along your arm, sending chills across your skin and grabbing your shoulder, pulling your back and wordlessly instructing you to turn your form and face your, her left and your right clasping together as she walks back, directing you to follow.

"Yet you're—"

"I have lived a long time. It only makes sense that I know how to dance." She cuts you off. Using simple steps to travel the entire ballroom. "Oh." You say softly, and you watch amusement seep into the grip, her touch slightly holding you close.

"Oh." Humor is etched into her tone as she mimics you and you find yourself falling silent. It's hard to say you know where you stand with the commander. Dancing with her is so easy. So comfortable. Following her steps, her gestures come as second nature. Yet this experience is so new to you, but to her—

She stops her movements and pulls away with you, just as the doors to the ballroom open and a maid appears, bowing. Just by her appearance, Anil lets out a sigh. Buttoning the top buttons of her shirt. "In just a moment." She acknowledges the servant, glancing back at you before stepping towards the ballroom doors.

"Thank you for dancing... with me..." You speak up quickly, and the commander pauses. She turns around and faces you fully. She stares at you, really stares, crossing her arms as she nods. There is this soft breeze that sweeps across your form.

"You're welcome."