

166 – Confrontation

Emily was still complaining to her brother about his behaviour, but he was making a great show of ignoring her words. We were heading back towards the Guild district, spread between two white carriages. I was seated in the same one as Emily, Oliver, and Elye. Saoirse, Renji, Kally, and Armen were in the other.

“I can’t believe you’d force Ryūta into such a situation! I already told you he’s the reason I even came here and could meet you! Why would you do something so selfish!”

He finally chose to respond to her words. “It is not selfish to wish to avenge the death of hundreds, if not thousands, of dead, nor seek to prevent any others a similar fate. I will not apologise for pursuing the Demonologist.”

“It’s not about that! It’s about you thrusting Ryūta into a situation he has no say in!”

“And how do *you* feel?” Oliver asked, looking at me.

“I have my own reasons for seeking the death of Carmine Anabello, so I am glad to have learnt his whereabouts thanks to you. However, I don’t appreciate being made a pawn in your bid for the royalty’s acceptance of your Order, nor do I appreciate having my friends dragged into it without a say.”

“See!” Emily said.

“But what’s done is done,” I muttered in an attempt to calm her down.

“Thank you, Ryūta,” Oliver said.

I shook my head. “Don’t thank me. I have no intentions of betraying the Elfin of Redmoss in order to allow your Order an entry. I will be the one to bring Carmine his punishment.”

“My Order can make it worth your while.”

“My integrity is not for sale,” I replied sternly.

Elye was fiddling with the amethyst necklace that Lukas had given her. “*Elfin venerate Andasangare. They would not allow you to harm their honoured guest.*”

All three of us looked at her. It was the first time since finding her with Lukas’ body in her arms that I’d heard her speak in such a serious tone.

Oliver was about to try and convince her when she said, “*I will bear the shame of breaking the rules of my people. I will pierce his heart and kill him, with the same knife that Lukas entrusted to me in his final moments.*”

None of us knew how to respond to that.

Our carriages arrived to the Guild district by midday, and we all filtered out onto the street, with the heavy foot traffic parting around us, though everyone slowed down to look, as it seemed common knowledge that the white carriages were symbolic of an Otherworlder’s Advancement.

Renji stretched as he stepped out, his blonde hair an unruly mess, while Kally followed him out, looking like she hadn’t been able to sleep during the entire ride. Elye seemed full of energy still, and Emily had slept a little. Oliver had stayed awake but remained quiet, and I’d meditated to recoup some energy, though I knew I wouldn’t last until nighttime without a nap.

Outside the Adventurers’ Guild stood Ludwig Pawn, smoking one of his Gravebloom cigarettes. Emily, who’d just woken up, flinched at what she apparently saw next to him. Curious, I borrowed the vision of Karasumany, who’d been trailing us from the sky since we left Sanctum Island, and saw that a large headless skeletal horse stood next to him, using the long fingers of the many hands sprouting from its back to shelter his body.

It was exactly like Emily had first described it to me. “So that’s what a Finger Collector looks like,” I muttered as I stopped next to her.

“I wonder why he’s brought it out,” she muttered.

That is a good question...

“Were you expecting us, Savant Pawn?” Oliver asked as he walked up at the head of our group.

Armen and Saoirse joined Emily and I, while Elye returned to her usual hyper self and began bothering Renji. Kally stared daggers at the eager Elfin, before saying some words to Renji and walking past us all and into the Guild Hall.

“She’s going to borrow one of the rooms here,” the Spellfist explained as he came up next to us.

“I’ve been trying to get in contact with you lot for a while,” Ludwig said. “I’ve got some preem news to share.”

“What are you waiting for then?” Saoirse said.

He cleared his throat for dramatic effect, before saying, “I caught that little fiend Kasbar and wriggled the truth out of him. Carmine Anabello was apparently keeping him hooked on a Euphoric called Moth Wing, the same stuff that many Witch Hunters seem to have grown a fondness for.”

Oliver frowned. “That’s not news.”

“To me it was. Anyway, I also found out where the Demonologist is hiding,” he said this latter part with a shit-eating grin on his face.

“Redmoss Enclave,” I answered.

Ludwig’s grin faltered and he narrowed his eyes, before pointing his cigarette at me. “How the fuck did you know?”

“I told him,” Oliver said. “He was kind enough to inform me that you know a way into the territory that doesn’t involve violating their sovereignty.”

“How long has your Order known about Carmine’s whereabouts?” Ludwig asked, his voice turning serious.

“Given that we’re the ones who chased him there, it has been about two weeks now.”

“I see... Well then, in the spirit of cooperation, you can kindly go fuck yourself.”

“Don’t be unreasonable, Ludwig.”

He jabbed the vanilla-scented cigarette in Oliver’s direction, dropping the ashen tip to the ground in the process. “Your Order has known all this time! But instead of sharing the knowledge, you’ve just been sitting on it and hoping the King allowed you to trample the old Enclave Treatises!”

Oliver frowned, but then nodded once. “I see. I will return again tomorrow, when you have had time to consider the matter.”

“There will be no tomorrow!” Ludwig yelled at him. “Mortl and I are leaving today.”

“You would deny me my revenge?” Oliver asked, a dangerous look in his eyes.

“Revenge does not just belong to you, you fucking narcissist!” Ludwig scolded him. “You would burn the Enclave if you thought it served your objective. You think that the ends justify the means! But I’m here to tell you that you’re wrong. *We* will handle this. You have done your part.”

Before Oliver could blow up in his face, as his aura seemed to indicate, Emily stepped in front of him and began talking him down.

Ludwig stepped towards me and said, “You, Armen, Elye, and Saoirse should join us.”

I nodded. “Of course.”

He looked around, then came to the same realisation that the Princess had.

“Where’s Potts?”

“I’ll tell you about it on the way to Redmoss.”

“You should get some rest first. You look like shit.”

“I can sleep in the carriage,” I replied.

As though Saoirse had known this would happen, a dark carriage came speeding down the road towards us, driven by a hooded coachman and with two dark horses at the front. It was, as before, all created by the Dullahan’s dark smoke.

“I’d like to join,” Renji told Ludwig.

I could tell from his aura that the Incarnate wasn’t sure how to let him down gently, so I said, “You just got your Advancement and they won’t allow just anyone to enter their Enclave, at least if it’s anything like Skovslot.”

“They’re stricter,” Ludwig added quickly.

“I see,” he replied, clearly disappointed.

I leaned a bit closer and whispered, “We also can’t bring Emily. It’s too dangerous, but I don’t want to leave her here alone. Kally is nice enough towards her, but I think that’s mostly for your sake.”

He nodded, putting on a smile. “I got it.”

I handed him the Quest Flier that Potts had given me. “If you have time, you should look into this.”

Renji looked at it and said, “But I don’t have the Investigation passive.”

“You’re smart enough without it,” I told him.

“I know what you’re doing,” he replied, and I couldn’t help but freeze-up at the accusation. “But thank you, I’ll keep busy with this investigation and make sure Emily doesn’t feel too lonely. It seems like her and her brother aren’t on as good terms as I thought.”

“They’re family, they’ll get over this disagreement,” Armen said wisely.

Ludwig blinked. “Oliver and Emily are related?”

Renji laughed, while I just shook my head.

A moment later, Mortl came walking out of the Guild Hall’s gate. “Is everyone ready?”

I met the eyes of those around me, even Oliver who seemed to have calmed down thanks to Emily, before nodding. “We’re ready to go.”

The Necromancer, who was using her Second Vessel, looked at Saoirse and then at the carriage. “So this is the famous vehicle I have heard so much about. Well then, let us go extinguish the Demonologist’s flame.”