

CSJETELAND

NODE 2: KILLER



Meanwhile, the girls could only wait with impatient agitation as they awaited Gudao and Robin to return from their scouting. The forest was one the three of them knew well. The kingdom, essentially, was Elizabeth's own after all. Gudako and Gudao had both traversed the terrain during Halloween events past, and Mashu had at least seen her Masters' travels in this land during each Halloween endeavor. Nothing other than low leveled monsters ever showed up around here, and considering both Mashu and Liz were at level cap there was nothing for them to really fear.

But what took Gudako by surprise was Elizabeth's mood. She'd been so rowdy before, and yet the idol hadn't said a peep since Gudao and Robin had left. **"Everything okay?"** Placing a hand gently on Elizabeth's shoulder, the dragon practically jumped to attention. The redhead couldn't help but smile. As much as a handful as she could be, there was something endearing about Elizabeth in the end. **"Things look pretty depressing right now, but as long as we're together they always work out right?"**

"O-Of course deerlet! I knew that!" Liz puffed out her chest proudly, though she almost looked to be on the verge of tears thanks to this act of kindness. Was she deserving of the kind of support she received? She often wondered, being an ex-serial killer, but she was grateful nonetheless. **"I was just wondering who could be behind this? The writing bore to much resemblance to my own to not be me, so... AH! WAIT! Could the culprit be..."** A rare moment of clarity was realized. There was definitely someone that could replicate her hand writing if they really wanted to.

...It was just unfortunate that said person was keeping tabs on the group. **"We can't have you solving the mystery so soon."**

A high pitched squeaking sound suddenly blasted throughout the forest, almost like the sound of a car's breaks but dialed up to eleven. The idol was forced to bring clawed fingers to cover her pointed ears much like her fellow travelers had been. In that moment when her guard was dropped, a knife flew through the air from above and clipped the dragon across the right cheek before embedding in the ground below... before it melted into the shadows. The girl recoiled in slight, but was only able to check for wounds when the sound that came about so suddenly faded just as quickly.

The knife's blade had been laced with the very same formula Gudao had been infected with earlier.

As soon as the noise had faded the three girls groaned about the suddenness of the sound and voiced their confusion, Gudako only noticing Elizabeth's wound after the three had glanced at each other for a moment. **"Liz are you okay? How did you cut your face?"**

"Ah?" Her left index finger, hardened in the form of a pink claw, brushed up against the cut on her cheek to reveal a bit of blood. She pulled her hand away and looked at the crimson against her pink. It wasn't as if she'd never seen blood before. **"Are we under attack, deerlet!? I don't sense any killing intent!"** But she didn't pull her eyes away from her own finger. Or rather Elizabeth couldn't *seem* to.

She was hurt. She wanted to be comforted by *'her mother'*.

Mother? She barely had such a thing. Parental love was not something easy to come by in the broken Bathory family and their neglect had allowed their daughter to flourish into a monster on her quest for a beauty they'd made her believe was her only redeeming feature as a woman.

But she longed for her mother's embrace now, in that moment.

A single chill suddenly ran down her spine, and the claw she was staring at began to crack open like an egg shell. It wasn't just that one index finger though, as the effect began to spread throughout each and every finger. They cracked and inevitably shattered, pink claw shards falling to the ground below her. As if they had a will of their own they formed two pools and seemed to meld together with each deposit of pink taking on a metallic silver sheen before reshaping until they were but two oddly-shaped killing knives sticking out from the ground.

But the dragon did not notice them, she was still distracted by the now clawless, fleshy fingers that rested atop her hands. Not since she'd lived as a human had her fingers ever looked that way. Real, human fingers! **"Ah! Deerlet! Look, my hands are normal!"** A draconian tail wagged behind her as she turned to look at her Master, on the verge of joyful tars.

An unusual weight suddenly tugged her head back for a moment before the sound of steel clanked against the ground, leaving her scalp feeling infinitely lighter than before. "Eh?" Hands rubbing the top of her head with panic, she quickly realized both of her horns were now gone as well. But turning back, she found a second pair of knives upon the ground where they'd seemed to have fallen. "**Knives?**" *'But those were my horns?'* "**Mother, my knives!**" Newly minted human fingers raised to her lips in shock at what she'd just blurted out. Not only was that not the comment she'd intended, but to blatantly refer to Gudako as 'Mother'?

From Gudako and Mashu's point of view it didn't look like Liz was merely regaining her humanity. It seemed more like her entire visage was beginning to shift. The idol herself had undergone changes other than her fingers and horns bestowing a sense of humanity, such as pointed ears becoming more rounded. The vibrant pink colour of her hair began to fade at its tips as well, and from what Gudako was seeing at least the hair itself seemed to be retracting in length.

Of course the Master was extraordinarily confused by the peppy idol Servant referring to her as 'Mother'. There was only one Servant brazen enough to do that and she had the mental instability to warrant it. "**Liz are you sure you're okay? You're beginning to talk a little like Jack.**" Jack the Ripper, infamous serial killer. Well... even in Chaldea her origins were still technically that, but she took the form of a young girl. "**I mean I'm so happy for you! I know you were self conscious about your draconian features a little, but that's not all that's changed.**"

"...**Not all that's still changing, senpai.**" Mashu corrected, desperately trying to get a line with Da Vinci-chan. It seemed their communications were being jammed however.

"**Of course I'm fine! I've never been better! Looking like this I bet I can become an even more amazing idol!**" A moment of clarity shone through the madness of what was occurring as Liz placed her hands confidently on her hips. Smooth fingertips upon her dress practically felt foreign. When was the last time she could feel anything with such detail, much less fabrics? The fabric of her dress, that she felt every day... and yet it suddenly slipped out of her fingers with supernatural haste. "**Wait, what!?**" Naturally Elizabeth's gaze shot downward just in time to see the skirt of her dress fully become one with its waistline, revealing her pink and white striped panties for all to see. "**NOOOO! MY DRESS! MOTHER! DON'T LOOK!**"

Gudako and Mashu had the good sense to look away embarrassed as Liz tried to cover up with a shriek. By this point in time her long pink hair had receded to her shoulders, white strands mixed in with pink. The blood from the wound on her cheek had all but disappeared, facial structure having softened and grown chubbier to resemble that of a child more than the early teen she already was.

"**Senpai! We need to stop this somehow!**" Ever rational, Mashu called out this thought in a panic. But of course there was no real way to deal with it when they didn't even know *how* it was happening. Even as the two scrambled around for an

idea, the waistline on Elizabeth's dress had pulled up to reveal her navel. The material had turned to leather and hugged her small chest comfortably, three straps that normally composed the chest piece having merged into a single top that wrapped around her neck.

"**Elizabeth!**" Gudako had an idea. It was possible to do the impossible with a Command Seal, and so as one of the red lines on her right hand begun to glow she announced her command. "**Return to normal!**" But that wording was a mistake. The second the serum had entered Elizabeth's body, '*normal*' had been completely redefined. It was an absolute.

And so a second scar appeared painfully, vertically down and across Liz's left eye, the pain bringing her to yelp and squint. When her eyes reopened, the brilliant blue had become a sharp but curious green. "**Mother that didn't work! It hurts, mother!**" Lurching forward it was almost like the dragon was suddenly being compressed. Limbs and torso began to condense, waning as years came off of her life. Centimeters dropped off her body as her weight was redistributed, hands and feet becoming almost infantile but capable, scars amassing themselves across skin that had been so well taken care of.

The red diamonds on her legs dissipated, and in their wake two tattoos in the shape of reversed teardrops appeared her upper arms. The puffy sleeves she wore on her lower arms compressed against their shrinking form until her right hand was gloved and her left completely bandaged. Had she the energy to scream she might have, but Elizabeth was suddenly feeling drained.

The physical changes aside her thoughts had become *peculiar*. Her own voice was the loudest in her mind, but it was like she was sitting in the theatre alongside dozens, no, hundreds of children. Thoughts she'd never had before invaded. '*We want to go inside mother*'. '*We are the abandoned*'. '*No one has ever loved us*'. '*Kill. Kill. Kill.*'.

"**SHUT UUUUP! WE HEAR YOU! WE HEAR YOU! BUT WE REFUSE!**" The child that was presumed to be Elizabeth curled up into the fetal position as the voices badgered her, bringing her to tears. She hadn't even noticed that her tail had fallen off and melted into the form of a black cloak, or that her hair had finally regressed to a point where it was simply short and white. Kicking her heel, now supporting an unfamiliar, long boot against the ground, the child could only panic.

"**Shh, shh. It's okay. I'm here, alright? Don't panic.**" Gudako was truly at a loss here. The striped panties Liz had been wearing finally painted themselves pitch black and hugged her soft skin tightly, leaving before her a child that was clearly, *physically* Jack the Ripper. Maternal instinct aside, she couldn't leave Liz alone to fight whatever strange thoughts were assaulting her. Maybe she'd be able to retain her sense of self that way! She prayed. If it was lost, who knew if they'd be able to fix things later? She couldn't help but feel responsible -- had the Command Seal worsened things?

She knelt down and began stroking the Assassin's head, the child's eyes opening slowly as some relative peace returned to her mind. She quickly clung to Gudako for warmth and comfort. "**Mother? We're okay because Mother is here. This is scary but we... We can become a child idol, right?**" Thank goodness there seemed to be something left. A passion that couldn't be erased.

As long as she had her passion for the stage as her guiding light, there was still hope Liz could be salvaged.

Or so Gudako hoped.

Clinging to Gudako, 'Jack' couldn't help but feel like she was forgetting something. The culprit... hadn't she...? No, it didn't matter. She was safe in mother's arms!