

## ~ Day 118 ~

Smack!

"GAH!"

Thunk!

"Urgh..."

Laying on my back on the graveled ground of the château, I groaned.

"I thought the Matriach instructed you to teach me how to fight, not beating the ever-living shit out of me for two days straight..." I grumbled as I stared back up at the cowled figure looming over me who was this supposed 'teacher' of mine. "Besides, don't you have other things to do than teaching me? Like policing the laws of this city or somesuch?"

Ever since two days ago where I had been presented with the offer of having a teacher to help me get control over my own fighting capabilities and magic, I had accepted it.

But now in hindsight, if I had known that I would then be summarily beaten up Execrutix for an entire day, and the next, I might've reconsidered...

Being thoroughly slapped around with the sides of her blades and blunted by the bud of the shaft was quite a humbling and humiliating experience, but I bore with it as I doubted she would put me through that while there was no actual reason for it.

"I am, I just need to beat those bad habits of your out of you first." She merely stated, twirling the two short dagger in her hands.

Putting them into the sheaths by each hip, she paused.

"You've never faced real defeat," She explained. "Only having life and death battles dictate your skill and mastery in the art of fighting. Without an instructor or someone to spar with, to then lose and then reflect on your mistakes, there hasn't been haven't been anyone to correct you in your faults."

"While experience with death is a vital thing to have for any combatant, more so than any other type of experience," She continued. "The fact that you've never faced a true defeat as that would mean actual death, that's resulted in the fact that you have never had the opportunity to learn from your flaws and polish the things you could do better. That's why both real battle experience and taught fighting experience are vital for any real progress as a warrior."

Sitting up with my legs crossed, I rested my head on my hand with a deep sigh.

"Yeah, I guessed as much," I muttered although I loathed to agree with my *abuser*.

Over the last month, I realized that my fighting style was nothing better than a wild animal throwing everything at its disposal at its enemies and hoping for the best. That was of course one of the main reasons why I had accepted to proposed offer from the Matriarch so readily.

"All those skills you seem to possess, including your twinned magic core, are all very useful things to have in battle and the amount of utility you wield is limitless," She paused. "However, all your attention is split, not focusing on one or few at a time."

"While I've failed to figure out your talent during this small amount of time," She continued. "I am certain that being a jack of all trades certainly isn't it."

"Do I even have a talent for anything...?" I scoffed, feeling rather down as this one fact had bothered me ever since acquiring real power but being unable to use it to its fullest extent.

That I wield all this power but knowing that it's wasted on someone whose merely 'decent' at utilizing it was abhorrently infuriating to me.

Unexpectedly, the Executrix shot me such an intense glare from under that hood I was positive it would burn a hole in me. Like in all instances since first seeing this frighteningly powerful woman, all her interactions had been obscure and hard to read. Unable to see her face or hear any emotion in her voice, she was totally unreadable. However, right this moment, even though I couldn't see her eyes under that cowl, I could feel the intensity of her glare.

"Everybody has a talent." Her icy-cold voice stated, making the hairs on my skin rise as I had almost forgotten the fact that this woman was a walking powerhouse.

Before I could react though, that gaze disappeared and her posture returned to her usually neutral stance, not betraying her emotion anymore.

"This is enough for today, you have mandatory attendance for tomorrow's second stage." She explained, turning to leave. "I will inform your mate's teacher that training is over for today, go get some rest."

She paused, glancing over her shoulder at me.

"We will continue once you return," She said before her tone grew somber. "Everyone has a talent..."

Sitting there, I was rather flabbergasted watching that usually inscrutable woman walk into the palace.

Although Bob, Mia, and I could've watched the two first days of matches unfold and scouted out our potential opponents, the fact remained that in the first few battles no noteworthy abilities or skills would be revealed as the strongest groups were seeded in the brackets.

But even so, I would rather prioritize getting my fighting-style fixed rather than knowing the superfluous information about my opponent's capabilities.

"Oh-my, oh-my," A sudden melodic voice sounded out from behind me. "I haven't seen her so riled-up in a long time..."

"Yeah... that was rather unexpected..." I muttered, getting to my feet.

"Greetings Lady Eryanne," I said respectfully as I turned to face the matriarch.

She chuckled with a hand to her mouth.

"Oh, so well-mannered."

"As always... what brings your delightful-self here?" I asked.

"Flattering and sweet words won't get you far young man." She bounced back coyishly.

"I don't hear you reject them." I shot back, meeting her tease.

"I'm not." She stated simply with a genuine smile.

"So what was it about what I said that ticked my borderline-torturer off?" I asked, shooting a nod in the direction that the Executrix disappeared off to.

"Oh, Lana?" She mused. "Thinking oneself incapable and talentless is generally the only thing that can set her off. Like Asial, Lana had a bad upbringing."

"I see, I must be careful not to pry in that wound in the future." I sighed.

"No worries, it's a widely known story in the family and she wears what she has gone through proudly; exactly because she came out contradictory to everybody's expectations."

"Really now?" I muttered. "With how powerful and stout she is, I wouldn't have expected that..."

"Well, yeah... for most of her life, her ability and talent were less than subpar. And in the family that once was, before I became Matriach, the rules were... much stricter for those incapable."

She sighed.

"Essentially, Lana was sold off to the previous city regent of Ebongrave, to not only be his plaything but also an incubator for a **Dark Core** that the old city lord wished to give to his son. A truly cruel and dark practice that was once done to the young of the family who saw no potential for magic." At this last mention, she looked incredibly sorrowful, as if remembering old memories.

Shocked, I looked at the melancholic expression on Eryanna's beautiful face, thinking back to a certain individual that had faced a fate similarity cruel as merely a child.

However, my look went unnoticed as she continued with the story.

"After years of abuse, a certain powerful pale-skinned unknown drow came into the city. It was by his hand that she was liberated from her fate as trash and nothing more than a doll to

be played with when he rose to power, overthrowing the old regent. In her, Lord Nosferas saw great potential, something nobody else could-"

I listened to her words, however, my mind was going in another direction.

Before I knew it, I blurted out a name.

"Mika."

Suddenly stopping, the Matriach froze.

"W-hat?" She asked stiffly.

"Where did you hear that name...?"

"Was he a child of this household?" I asked, a sorrowful note tinging my voice as I thought back to that sweet but badly hurt kid.

"Y-yes, but you still haven't explained why you know that name!" The Matriarch said, her voice raising an octave.

"Asial had this young kid... a drow... he-"

"Impossible!" The Matriarch refused, her whole demeanor flustered. "Mika... h-he, died alongside with his parents..."

I shook my head sadly.

"The story he had been told was that his parents died but Asial... *saved* him..."

The Matriarch didn't respond, clearly figuring out how this all pieced together with the other inconsistencies that she knew about the story.

"She had been... using as one of those incubators you mentioned... and experimented on...." I explained, realizing now what the Mistress's true intentions had been all way back then when I was just a prisoner to her sick schemes.

"I-is he?" She asked somberly.

"He died in my arms..." I muttered with a hand over my chest. "But he's still with me..."

Eyes going wide, she stretched out her hand but hesitated.

Understanding what she wanted to do, I simply nodded and removed my hand.

Feeling her presence on my twin-fused core, I opened up, letting her sense the true nature and origin of it.

It was only a few seconds later that she removed her hand shakily. The confident and stout woman was clearly distraught, but true to her station as a Matriach of an entire noble house, she quickly collected herself and reigned in the emotions one could only feel from the wounds of losing a dear family member.

"Mika was my nephew, my baby little sister's child." Eryanne explained.

"I'm very sorry..." She said. "During my time as Asial's arena fighter, Mika would attend to me and he became one of the only things that I could latch onto to stay sane..."

"I-it would seem that we share much more than merely common interests young Xavier." She said with a weak smile.

"I would've invited you and your partner into the family with the fact of Mia's potential and race, but now also this... if not for you already possessing a family name, I would've done so on the spot..."

"Ah- so you knew about that?" I asked sheepishly.

"Yes, I must apologize, but we do it to almost any figure of notice and importance that enters the city. And since your defense against divination skills and items are non-existent, I hope you don't mind that the members of my household took advantage of that."

"I guessed as much, but yeah, I understand..."

Trailing off, we both fell into silence, the atmosphere having taken a turn since mentioning Mika and his unfortunate fate.

"I'm sorry Xavier, but I have certain family matters that need to be attended to regarding this," She explained before pausing. "Thank you for sharing this, and know this; if you ever find yourself in a need of help or without somewhere to stay, the Menethil household will always have a place for you."