

[Adam POV]

The black market of the Alvarez Empire was located in the heart of the city, hidden away from the watchful eyes of the guards and citizens, which was funny considering Irene, a high-ranking official of the country knew where it was.

The entrance to the market was a rather simple-looking wooden door, guarded by two large men of around eight feet tall each, who ensured that only those who knew the password were allowed in.

The password to enter changed every week, and only those who were part of the black market's inner circle were ever privy to that information.

Once inside, the market became a bustling hive of activity.

The air around was thick with the smell of smoke, alcohol, and other substances, alongside the dimly lit stalls, which were packed with all manner of strange and exotic items.

From potions that claimed to cure all manner of ailments, to weapons of all shapes and sizes, including ones that were rumored to be enchanted with dark magic.

As I walked deeper and deeper into the market, I noticed in one corner of the market, a group of drunk men huddled together around a table, playing a game of chance with a pile of gold coins in the middle.

In another, a shady-looking wizard could be seen selling illegal spells to anyone with enough coin to pay for them.

Beyond that, there were also cages containing dangerous magical creatures, which were being sold to wealthy collectors or used for fighting rings.

Despite the chaos and danger that could be seen around the place, there was a sense of order in the black market. I didn't have to ask Irene or Mavis to know that traders and customers alike knew their place.

According to Irene's commentary, any disputes were quickly settled by the market's enforcers, who were armed with deadly weapons and powerful spells to aid them in their particular job.

"We have arrived," Irene said, a silent smile playing on her lips.

I looked at the stalls in front of me, and true to her word, she had brought me to where I needed to be.

The Rod of Flesh.

According to Mavis, it is said to be made from a twisted and gnarled wood that is infused with magic and multiple runic enchantments.

The rod itself is approximately three feet long, its surface is covered in pulsing veins of flesh that seem to throb and pulse with a sickening life of their own.

The item was said to have the power to warp reality to a limited extent, allowing the rod to bend the flesh of the wielder's target in a various degrees of manners.

Rumors say that whoever holds the rod can command it to change their own flesh and that of others, bending it to their will and causing incredible transformations.

Not only that, but some of the darker rumors have also hinted that whoever uses this with enough knowledge and power, can transform other living beings into twisted and contorted versions of themselves, warping them into grotesque amalgamations of their former selves.

That being said, most of that were just rumors, as according to Mavis, the rod can't do much other than alter and bend flesh without a will of its own, meaning the item itself was useless in combat.

"Thanks," I nodded, looking at the item.

Mavis stood motionless by my side, her eyes wide and unblinking, as she stared at the strange object before her. Her lips were parted, and she exhaled a shallow breath as she spoke softly, her voice barely a whisper, "You need to find an escape, and quickly."

No shit, Sherlock.

"How much?" I asked the merchant.

[Drobralat Pxhi - Black Market POV]

As soon as I laid my eyes on my latest customer, I knew I was in trouble.

For the woman who stood before me was none other than Irene Belserion.

"Didn't you hear my companion ask you a question, merchant?" Irene said, her voice low and menacing. "In case

you didn't, allow me to bring some light into the matter. What is the price of this item?"

I took a step back, and hesitated, feeling a bead of sweat trickle down my forehead. I knew that if I wanted to live another day I should not anger this woman.

"It's..." I began.

However, before I could mutter another word, Irene spoke again, her cold voice sending shivers down my spine, like a knife dancing on my throat. "My, my, aren't you slow? Perhaps you need to hear the question again?"

I could feel my heart pounding in my chest, and my knees starting to give up. This was bad, very bad.

I was going to die.

I was going to die...

I didn't want to die!

"It's... free."

[Adam POV]

"It's.... free, Lady Irene..."

I watched how Irene terrorized the black market merchant into giving me the Rod of Flesh for free, her cold detached presence being more than enough to subjugate the spirit of the man to ashes.

Irene's lips twitched into a mocking smirk as she fixed the merchant with a stony glare, before she flicked her wrist towards the item, indicating that I should take it. "Free you say? My my, what a generous merchant you are," she drawled sarcastically.

Generous...

Right...

More like smart enough to know he's well out of his depth.

Talking about that.

I need to focus on finding a way out of this place before she gets bored with me, and decides to kill me.

"Thanks," I nodded, grabbing the item from the merchant's trembling hands.

Irene's dark eyes narrowed on me. Her lips pressed into a thin, hard line, her posture stiffening ever so slightly as if she was a beast ready to pounce. "So, is that all you needed, Adam?"

I nodded once again. "Thanks for your help."

Irene's lips curved in a sinister arc, as her eyes flashed with delight. "So with that out of your way, I assume you're leaving now?"

I held my breath, looking at her.

She was playing with me.

"I am," I replied.

Irene offered me a simple smile, as she gave me a gentle pat on the shoulder before turning around and walking away. Her heels clicked against the hardwood floor. "Until next time, Little Fairy," she called over her shoulder, before disappearing out of sight.

She knew...

She had helped me just to amuse herself, she was allowing me to leave just because it humored her.

That crazy bitch was even more dangerous than I anticipated.

Without a moment's hesitation, I took the opportunity Irene had given me and blasted out of the capital. I raced through the streets, ignoring everything else, and in three steps I was out of the city, standing alone in the middle of the desert.

The hot sand whipped up around me as I continued to speed away, soon fading into the horizon.

Finally out of Irene's reach, I came to a stop, feeling an electric-like current running through my veins. It felt like there was like a wild beast caged within me, straining at the bars, seeking to break free.

With each passing moment, I could feel my power rising within. It started as a low hum, a gentle yet noticeable vibration that spread from my fingertips to his toes.

But as the seconds passed, it grew, stronger and stronger, until it was a wild, roaring storm that threatened to consume everything around me, even the desert itself.

Even though I knew I would've stood no chance against her, I was mad, no... I was fucking livid. Mad I hadn't got to fight her, mad I hadn't been able to see her might, mad I hadn't been allowed to cut loose.

As those thoughts invaded my mind, a grin spread across my face as I let out a deep, rumbling laugh.

The air around me began to shimmer as my power continued to surge throughout my body. The sand beneath me began to shake in a vortex, as the sky above me darkened as clouds gathered overhead.

Next time, next time I would be ready to face her.

"You need to stop!" Mavis whispered urgently. "If you don't reign in your power! There is no guarantee she will let you go!"

"I don't care," I replied, for a moment letting my battle lust override all logic. Realizing this, I took a deep breath, forcing myself to calm down. "I'm sorry, you're right. We were lucky this time."

[Irene Belserion POV]

My lips pulled into a playful smirk as I peered over the desert beyond the city walls.

Even from afar I could feel his power, and I had to say, the kid was on his way to becoming a force to be reckoned with. His raw, unbridled power radiated off of him in waves, threatening to consume everything on his path.

His magic power was heavy, and aggressive, like a weight that pressed down on the shoulders of those who dare to challenge him.

It felt suffocating in nature.

Wild.

"Good," I allowed a wry smile to curl my lips. My eyes gleaming with anticipation. If he was this powerful now, I could hardly imagine how much more thrilling it would be to kill him later.

[Second POV]

August, the old wizard, also known as the Wizard King, strode through the halls of the Alvarez Empire's castle, his robes slowly billowing behind him.

He had just learned that Irene Belserion had confronted the intruder, and instead of dealing with him, she had allowed him to escape from her clutches, and he wanted to know why.

Knowing her, he made his way to the Throne Room where he found Irene sitting on the throne with a wicked grin on her face. As soon as she saw August, she chuckled and gestured for him to approach.

"Well, well, well," Irene said, her voice dripping with sarcasm. "If it isn't my dear fellow Shield, August. What brings you to my throne room today?"

August scowled at her, pushing aside the fact she had referred to his Majesty's throne as hers, he would address that later, for now onto the matter at hand. "You know exactly why I'm here, Irene. Why did you let that boy go?."

Irene laughed at that, an amused playful high-pitched sound that echoed through the room. "Oh, so that's why you came to me," she said, shaking her head. "Oh August, you think you

know me so well, don't you? But you don't. You never have, and you never will."

August narrowed his eyes and gritted his teeth, he didn't have the patience today to play her games. "Stop playing games, Irene, and answer the question."

Irene leaned back on the throne, her fingers tapping against the armrest, one after the other in a spine-chilling rhythm. "Well, let's see," she said, tilting her head to the left, index finger pressed upon her lips. "Maybe I just felt sorry for him... or maybe I thought he deserved a chance to live his life, to grow up and become a powerful mage like us. Or maybe... just maybe, I just got bored, and wanted to spice things up."

August narrowed his eyes on her. "You let him go for that? You? The woman without mercy? I don't believe you."

Irene shrugged, rolling her eyes. "Believe what you want, August. It doesn't matter to me. I did what I did, and now the boy is gone. End of story."

August hesitated for a moment. He would be the first one to advocate for the life of a child, no matter the reason behind his execution sentence, but for Irene to be the one to do it?

It didn't quite click, so he couldn't shake the feeling that there was more to this than she was letting on.

"You really enjoy making things more difficult than they have any right to be, don't you?" August said, his eyes fixed on the woman before him.

Irene smirked. "Maybe I do," she said, her voice low and dangerous. "Maybe I don't, who knows?" And with that, she stood up from the throne and swept out of the room, leaving August alone to ponder her words.