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The Former **Assassin**  
Who Got Reincarnated  
as a **Noble Girl**



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The Former Assassin Who Got Reincarnated as a Noble Girl Vol.1

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MOTO ANSATSUSHA, TENSEI SHITE KIZOKU NO REIJOU NI NARIMASHITA. by  
Satsuki Otonashi

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Original Japanese edition published by SHUFU TO SEIKATSU SHA CO.,LTD

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Cross Infinite World

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Published in the United States of America

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Digital Edition ISBN: 979-8-88560-130-6

Print Edition ISBN: 979-8-88560-131-3





# Prologue

I don't have a name. They only ever called me by a number: 9956.

My earliest memories are of me living on the squalid streets of the slums. A man would come to me, I would kill the person he told me to, and then he'd give me money.

I lived like that for a long time.

I never considered killing people was bad. It was just a means of survival. Honestly, I didn't have a reason for wanting to survive, either. But nothing made me want to die.

I lived because I was alive. I didn't die because I was alive.

When I was hungry, I ate. I earned money because you can't buy food if you don't have money.

That was all there was to it. It was nearly instinctual.

And, as I continued living like that, I found I'd become a rather famous assassin.

One day, I got a request to kill the crown prince.

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"I will not allow you to take him."

A knight was guarding the man I was trying to kill. He was skilled, too.

"I will go down with you, if need be, to protect him."

*This guy says some weird things. You'd throw away your life for someone else's?*

His way of thinking made no sense to me. I'd spent my whole life living only for myself.

I just did my job.

I swung my blades to complete the request, knowing my opponent was so skilled I was unlikely to make it out alive. But that fact was as emotional as if it were about someone else.

I wasn't afraid to die.

# One: Living in This World Is Painful

I failed to kill the prince.

The knight called it. We killed each other.

All that was well and good. It's what's happening now that makes no sense.

"Good morning, Selena. You're so cute today, like always," said a woman with black hair and blue eyes. She was holding me. I couldn't understand how she was holding me. A woman with arms as thin as hers wouldn't be able to pick up a full-grown person like me.

I reached out to push her away, but my hands were far smaller than I remembered. My body wouldn't move how I wanted it to.

*What the hell is going on? What happened to my body?*

"You're so energetic today, Selena." The woman rubbed her cheek against mine.

It was disgusting. I don't like being touched.

"Wah, waaaaah!"

*I can't talk. What is this? Someone explain this to me. I died, didn't I? Why am I still alive?*

"Oh, Selena, what's wrong?"

*Selena this, Selena that. Shut up already. My name isn't Selena. I don't have a name. The man who gave me work and money just called me a number.*

"You're a tool. Tools don't need names," he'd said.

"Aw, Selena, this is your first time seeing yourself in a mirror, isn't it? Maybe it surprised you."

*What?*

That's when I first noticed the mirror in front of me. It showed a baby with the



same black hair and blue eyes as the woman. But the mirror didn't reflect *me*.

*Something is wrong.*

In half disbelief, I moved my arm. The baby in the mirror moved its arm the same way as me.

.....

Next, I tried scratching my cheek. The baby in the mirror did the same thing. It *did* hurt.

In the mirror, there was the baby and the woman holding the baby.

*They look similar, so it's safe to assume they're mother and daughter.*

*And there's me. Dead me. I don't feel like I've turned into a ghost. Not like I would become one anyway. I don't have any lingering attachments to this world. I died because I was weak. End of story.*

Having thought through it that far, there was only one logical conclusion.

"&@#@? \$=++&\$£%@! &£\$&¥@&+\$%."

"Oh, what's the matter, Selena? There, there."

The woman patted my back to calm me.

I wasn't crying, though. I was shouting in confusion.

As far as I know, it was the first time my emotions had been in that much of a mess.

Actually, it was definitely the first time. Because I'd been reincarnated.

I'd heard the word "reincarnation" before. Some religious people in my last world taught about the cycle of reincarnation. One priest outside a church I happened to pass by said something like, "God grants blessings in death to those who did good deeds in life. That blessing will allow them to lead an incredible life in their next reincarnation."

I snorted at that. "Good deeds"? Good deeds by whose definition? These religious followers called anyone who believed in a different god "demons." They sometimes even killed them. You claim killing people is a sin but, do it

yourself? They preached about “good deeds,” but it was hard to believe they meant it literally.

I laughed at them because they probably called whatever deed was convenient for them a “good deed.” I made fun of them because it wasn’t like they’d ever experienced death. How could they proclaim, with certainty, that they’d be reincarnated and their next life would be blissful? And now look at me. *I’m* the one experiencing reincarnation.

They say you can never anticipate what happens in life, and they’re right. I’d never experienced anything that struck me to the core like this, and I probably never will again. I hope, at least.

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**LET’S** start over with an introduction. My name is Selena Violette. I am six years old. I was born into a duke’s family in the kingdom of Astra. This world is incredibly similar to my previous world, but it is not, in fact, the same world.

Oh, by the way, that black-haired, blue-eyed woman from earlier is my mother. Her name is Amaryllis. When I could first speak, I called her by her name, and she insisted I call her “Mother.”

Initially, I was confused, but I used to be an assassin. I’m good at adapting.

Assassination doesn’t always end once you’ve sneaked in and killed your target. Sometimes, you have to pretend to be someone near your target and spend time in their vicinity, meaning I’m good at becoming other people.

That’s what I thought, anyway. Not in a million years would I imagine the difference between an assassin’s common sense and a normal person’s common sense would cause me this much trouble.

I couldn’t do anything about being reincarnated. I just had to fully become the ordinary person named Selena Violette.

But I quickly learned how difficult that would be. That became evident when I reached the lively age of six.

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**“EEEEK!”**

Someone in the garden screamed. It was my maid. She screamed because I stabbed a dog that tried to attack me with a cake knife. The dog had slipped into our property from somewhere with a girl about the same age as me.

The dog's blood was all over my face and dress, but I didn't care. That used to be my every day.





“Selena, how could you do something so horrible?” said Amaryllis. We’d been in the garden having tea. She ran over to me and gripped my shoulders.

“Horrible?” I said, not understanding what she meant. I was just defending myself. It was the dog’s fault for attacking me. It was on the ground bleeding, its tongue hanging out because it was weaker than me. I wasn’t injured because I was stronger. Because I was agile enough to dodge its attack.

That’s how I’d always lived my life.

And yet...

I scanned the area, keeping an eye on Amaryllis. The maid was pale and trembling as she stared at me like she couldn’t believe what she was seeing. It was the same reaction all the people I’d killed before had. I didn’t think I needed to worry about it.

“Selena,” said Amaryllis, and I turned my attention back to her. “You cannot hurt living creatures. Not for any reason.”

What she said made no sense. That dog clearly had hostile intentions towards me and acted on them. Could Amaryllis not see that reality?

You cannot hurt living creatures? That’s the same as saying I’ll inevitably be hurt myself. This noblewoman grew up in a walled-off cloister and now lives in a dream world. I can’t say I envy her. She’s just a moron.

“Lives are not equally valuable,” I said. “That dog meant to kill me. If I didn’t kill it, it would’ve killed me. Are you saying I did something wrong by using a weapon to protect myself?”

The assertion seemed obvious, but Amaryllis looked at me like she’d just encountered some monster.

“Selena, it doesn’t matter what the reason is; it is wrong to harm a living creature unnecessarily. You may not be aware of this, but being stabbed with a knife is very painful.”

I am very aware, actually. I was stabbed several times in my previous world. I was an assassin; I got injured basically every day. And, by the way, being stabbed isn’t just painful. It can kill you if things take a turn for the worse.

I kept that counterargument inside my head.

“Don’t do to others what you wouldn’t want done to yourself,” said Amaryllis.

Is a statement like that really going to wrap this sort of situation up?

“Selena, you have good reflexes, don’t you? You surprised me with how fast you are. But, considering you can move like that, you should have been able to dodge the dog’s attack.”

But that wouldn’t end things. The dog would have kept attacking me so long as it could move. That makes the winner whoever acts first. What she’s saying isn’t realistic. I’m being far more logical. I’m right. But Amaryllis says what I did was wrong.

This environment is far too different from the one I used to live in. Are thought processes different when the environment is different?

Maybe I should just agree. Living here will get more painful if I don’t. I’m not going to happily turn into a moron, too, but this situation requires adaptability.

I failed. I’ll do better next time.

“I’m sorry, Mother. I was so scared by the dog, I just...” I said, tears in my eyes, and Amaryllis hugged me, relieved.

My body stiffened. I’d been hugged many times since becoming Selena, but I still couldn’t get used to the act. There wasn’t much I could do about it. I never did like being touched.

“I know,” she said. “It’s such a big dog. Of course you were scared. But you mustn’t do that again.”

“...I won’t.”

Would she say the same thing if her life was on the line?

Now that I think about it, it reminds me of what the knight who took me down with him said: *“I will go down with you, if need be, to protect him.”*

She must be cut from the same cloth he was. I can’t understand it.



## Two: The Dark Guild

**THE** dog I stabbed with a cake knife survived because Amaryllis called for someone to tend to its wound. Other factors that saved the dog's life were that the knife didn't have a pointed tip since it was for cake, and I, being a child, didn't have enough strength to drive it deeply enough, meaning it didn't reach the dog's heart.

How odd.

I knew the cake knife wasn't guaranteed to finish the dog off, so I put all my weight behind it. Apparently, children are lighter and weaker than I thought.

I looked at myself in a mirror. *I need to be stronger.* Amaryllis wouldn't react well if I told her that, though. I get the impression noble ladies are meant to be elegant.

Lately, the maids hadn't been reacting well when they saw me, either. I was just protecting myself.

Living in this world is painful.

"Um, uh..."

That was the girl who had trespassed into our garden, now coming in here. She was wearing a dress Amaryllis bought her. She was a plain-looking girl with brown hair and eyes, but some would probably say she was cute for that. Her name was Rosemary.

Rosemary didn't have parents. She just happened to take in that dog, named Bruce, and the two had lived together like family since. Something had to be wrong with the girl. She took in a dog when she was struggling to survive.

The Violette family had adopted Rosemary. Amaryllis felt bad for the girl because she had no parents. When it happened, I had the vague thought that people with excess money have an easier time reaching out a helping hand to others. I never had that excess, so I was never interested in others.

“I hope we can have a nice relationship, S-Sister,” said Rosemary.

“Yes. Me too,” I replied.

The maids looked concerned while they watched us.

They’re constantly jumping. Maybe the Bruce incident convinced them I’d stab someone the moment I didn’t like something.

When Rosemary approached me, I’d considered what I should do. It was probably best to give a friendly smile, so I did.

The maids looked relieved.

I’ll turn myself into a normal person like this, little by little. That should make life here slightly easier. But I can’t just set up an environment I find easy to live in. Based on earlier, my body is weak and frail. I have to resolve that immediately.

But no one will give a noble girl permission to do strength training. I could secretly train, but relying on training alone would dull my senses in actual combat.

“I’ll start with training, though,” I murmured.

Then, I could turn to real combat practice. I had an idea where to get that. I used to be an assassin, after all. I was familiar with what happened in the dark. Even in a different world, a different country, a different time, the darkness is always there. Just like how light is always there.

That day, I began training in secret. That normally wouldn’t be possible, but it was to my benefit that the duke’s family employed only undisciplined servants. They never checked on me. That let me easily slip out of the mansion.

I pawned some gems and went to buy weapons. My favorite weapon was a dagger, and I wanted to buy one I could conceal.

“Let me see that,” I said to the man working the weapon shop. After one glance and an unconcealed look of disgust, he turned to help another customer in the shop.

“Did you not hear me?” I said. “I told you to let me see that.”

“Miss, this isn’t a children’s playground,” he said. “I get it might be a bit much to expect a little lady like yourself who plays all day and gets doted on by her parents to understand, but I’m busy.”

*This child’s body is so inconvenient. I can’t even buy what I’m after.*

“Mister, I’m telling you to show me that dagger,” I said, letting him see a glimpse of my hostile aura as I threw the knife I snuck from the mansion at him. It skimmed his cheek before embedding itself into the wall behind him. “Do you need more convincing?”

“No... I’m getting it now.”

*You should’ve just done that to start with.*

The moment the shop owner turned his back to get it, a dagger flew towards me from a different direction. I dodged it by taking one step back.

The only other customer in the shop threw it. He had red hair pulled into a side ponytail and slanted gold eyes narrowed with amusement.

“Who are you? I don’t think you’re a normal girl,” he said.

He was fairly skilled himself. There was no way I could stand against him as I was currently. Even if it were me from my previous world, I likely wouldn’t survive a head-on assault against him.

“Fairly skilled, aren’t you?” he remarked. “You must have seen your fair share of fights.”

His suspiciously gleaming eyes gave me the impression of darkness. This man was familiar with the things that happened in the dark. His appearance only, though, implied he was a noble. Not just any noble, either. Someone fairly high ranking.

“You’re dressed like a commoner, but you’re a noble’s kid, aren’t you?” he said. “You don’t act or speak like any of the noble girls I know, however. I am quite confused by this contradictory creature I find before me.”

“There’s no need for confusion. Just accept me for what I am,” I said. “And if you want to know about me, you should tell me about yourself first.”

I don’t know if what I said offended the man or something, but he suddenly

let off a hostile aura. It was intense, too, capable of knocking out anyone not built out of strong enough stuff.

“Huh, you can handle that?” he said. “It looks like the ever-so-carefree Violette Duchy has brought us a cat of a very different color.”

My simple clothing wouldn't give away my family name, yet this man somehow guessed who my family was. I had no memory of meeting him before. I wouldn't forget meeting someone this flamboyant.

“My position requires me to remember the names and faces of all nobles,” he said. “Oh, yes, I haven't introduced myself yet. My name is Rick Oswald.”

Rick Oswald... The king's nephew. A man surrounded by dark rumors.

“Selena Violette. Would you like to work for me?”

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**RICK** Oswald was the head of the Dark Guild. I had wanted to contact such a dark guild sometime after training to prevent my senses from dulling, so I was glad I happened across him in the shop and that he asked me to join. It made things easier for me.

As the head of the Dark Guild, he carried out both normal requests and took on the role of eliminating anyone opposed to the king or kingdom.

“The contract's complete,” he said. “We can't have your absence from the mansion being discovered while you're training or on a mission. For that, we have Sia. Sia, come in.” When he called, a girl about the same age as me with white hair and red eyes came in. “Her name is Sia. She's an expert in disguise, though you'll believe me better if you see it. Sia, show her.”

She stepped out of the room for a few minutes, then came back looking exactly like me. I was shocked.

“What do you think? Looks just like you,” Rick said with pride.

In front of me was a perfect duplicate of myself. There wouldn't be any problems with something as complete as this.

“She can change her voice too. There's a magic stone in the choker she's wearing. She can speak with the same voice as you if you record yours into

that.”

The choker was studded with small diamonds, aquamarines, and sapphires. In the center was a tear-drop-shaped sapphire. That was likely the magic stone. At first glance, the choker looked like a simple accessory that wouldn't be out of place around a noble girl's neck. No one would suspect it was a magic stone.

Magic stones were special gems created by people of old, anyway. The method for creating them was lost to time. No one in modern times could create them, making them incredibly rare and valuable items most people never even saw. Just encountering one was said to be a miracle in and of itself, and purchasing one would require, at minimum, enough funds to buy an entire castle.

No one would realize it was a magic stone, even if Sia wore such an expensive object while transforming into me.

I was surprised this man had such an item, but things you never saw out in the world of light circulated the world of shadows like it was perfectly normal. They were probably relatively easy to acquire. And a dark guild could make far more money than a guild that played by the books.

People placed a price on another human life when requesting they be killed. That price was normally very high. Every time I learn what that price is, I can't help thinking people value other people's lives far too highly. The only difference between humans and other animals is that we have logic and intelligence. That's it. I don't feel a life that can be taken when someone tells me to take it has any value at all.

“I think this is the start of a good working relationship, Selena,” said Rick.

I'm likely an abnormality among all the nobility, raised wanting for nothing. Normally, I was met with disgust and suspicion for that, but Rick just said, “The number of things I don't know about this world is as vast as the mountains. So, regardless of everything else, I won't pry.”

He just accepted me as I was.

What a strange man.

**“AMARYLLIS,** you cannot adopt a commoner while keeping it secret from me, the master of the house.”

The day I signed the contract with Rick, Art came back to the mansion for the first time in a long time. I could hear him in the drawing room.

Art is my father in this world.

He had gray hair and eyes, and attractive features that sent female hearts racing. His voice and demeanor were both gentle, meaning a steady stream of women fell for him despite his being married to Amaryllis.

“Father, you hate me, don’t you?” accused Rosemary with a sniff.

Apparently, she was in the drawing room as well.

“Rosemary, was it?” said Art. “I’m speaking with Amaryllis at the moment. Can you please not interrupt?”

He might have said it gently, but his voice was coldly distant.

It didn’t seem he thought very highly of Rosemary, but abandoning a girl they’d adopted would damage the family’s reputation too much. That meant there was no way he could send her back to being a commoner. All he could do now was provide the bare minimum of education and then marry her off to a branch of the family or into a lower noble house.

“Y-You do hate me, Father. Because I’m a commoner!” Rosemary burst into tears. Amaryllis took her into her arms and consoled her.

“Howard, remove her from the room,” ordered Art.

I heard steps moving toward the door and Rosemary shrieking, “How horrible!” so I hid myself from their sight.

Rosemary came out of the room with a stern-looking man with silver hair and blue eyes. *That must be Howard.* I’d never met him, but I did remember Art had an advisor named Howard who accompanied him on his travels abroad. I heard the servants say Howard was a commoner, but Art was so impressed by his skills he made him his advisor.

“How horrible! I’m the daughter of a duke,” whined Rosemary.

“If you want to be treated as the daughter of a duke, then you must educate yourself as such. At the moment, you are nothing more than a commoner unaware of her place with good enough luck to stumble into this station, though you are now drowning there. It’s unpleasant to observe.”

Howard seemed disgusted by Rosemary. Maybe she rubbed him the wrong way even more than usual because he was also a commoner.

One incredible thing about Rosemary was that she didn’t get angry just then. She doesn’t get angry. She cries. Most people back off when someone starts crying, and anyone who doesn’t know the situation assumes she’s the victim.

It didn’t work on Howard, though. The most important thing to him was his orders from Art, the man who acknowledged his skills. He pulled Rosemary from the room as she sobbed. He may be a commoner, but he was Art’s advisor. Even the nearby servants were uncertain if they should go to Rosemary’s aid and watched as Howard dragged her away.

“The poor girl,” came Amaryllis’s voice from inside the room.

“Amaryllis, I don’t know what about her made you take pity on her, but I can’t do anything about it now that you’ve adopted her. I can’t send her back to being a commoner. I will do my best to treat her as my daughter, but do not be mistaken; your true daughter is Selena. Not *that* girl.”

The servants admired Amaryllis for showing nothing but sympathy for Rosemary and called her a kind mistress. Art was probably the first person to criticize her for it. She never would have imagined her actions could draw criticism. Even from the other side of the door, I could tell she was confused.

“Amaryllis, our daughter is Selena. You know that, right?” Art pressed. “And that Rosemary girl doesn’t seem as deserving of pity as you say she is. Yes, it is sad she has lost her parents, but she met you immediately afterward. Normally, she would have ended up in the slums. She avoided that future. Isn’t that alone good fortune enough? Though, perhaps this isn’t something a noble like myself is in a position to say.”

Amaryllis didn’t say anything.

“Amaryllis,” Art continued, “I think it’s wonderful that you want to help



others, but perhaps you should focus your attention inside the mansion before looking outside. Have you even spoken to Selena recently?"

Is that important? I don't think there's a problem just because we haven't spoken. That's actually better for me.

"Art, is Selena really my daughter?"

"What do you mean?"

"I can never understand what she's thinking. And she's...somewhat frightening."

She's right. But also not. Amaryllis did indeed give birth to me. I am her real daughter, as unpleasant as it is to think I came from that blithe woman. But it is true. However, inside, I am also a slum child of no one knows who. I was an assassin. Maybe someone as twisted as me could never fully turn into a noble girl who knows nothing of the filth of the world.

"Selena is our daughter. Girls her age can be difficult. I'm sure that's all it is," said Art.

"Maybe..."

"It's my fault for being away from home for so long on business. I'll make every attempt to come home as often as possible. I'll write letters when I'm away. I will try to stay engaged with both of you, so please consult me before making any decisions."

"Yes, Art. I apologize for doing this without speaking to you first."

Their conversation seemed to pause. They started telling each other what they had been doing, so I returned to my room and lay on the bed.

"This has turned into a hassle."

I was glad Amaryllis had been avoiding me. And it was also likely better for Amaryllis, the blithe woman who doesn't think deeply about anything. I hadn't spent much time with Art, so I couldn't say much about him since I lacked information. Based on his conversation with Amaryllis, though, he seemed like he had things together.

*That's inconvenient for me.*

“If he finds out, do I kill him?”

No, I can't do that. I'm too young to become the head of the family. I don't think Amaryllis can handle it. If it comes to that, there's too high a chance someone from the extended family will step in to take over.

“How annoying.”

I didn't have parents in my previous world. I never once felt jealous of people with parents, nor did I ever think I was better off without them. I just never knew what it felt like to have parents.

Having parents means having restrictions. I never imagined it would be this annoying. The only thing in my favor was that Art interacted with Selena so few times I could count the number on one hand. That lets me gloss over a lot of things.

Sia should be able to get through this when transformed into me. She just needed to avoid interacting with them the same way I did. There shouldn't be any issues if she limited the time they were in contact.

I'm not getting anywhere worrying about it now. Let's wait and see what happens.

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I slipped out of the mansion on days I had training scheduled with Rick, always careful of Art. Sia replaced me at the mansion. I always received a report from her about everything that happened while I was gone, no matter how trivial. If I didn't, the inconsistencies would add up until my lies were discovered.

In addition to the training I agreed on with Rick, I quietly did training in the mansion when everyone went to sleep.

I had been away from the job for some time, but my instincts quickly came back to me. The hardest part was, unsurprisingly, this weakling body. I never would've gotten so worn out from basic training.

After half a year of training, I finally reached a level I could use in an actual fight.

Rick gave me a job then, almost like he'd been waiting for the moment I was ready. My first job was to assassinate a certain baron family. The target was both the baron and his family. He had a son and a daughter. The son was fourteen, and the daughter was twelve.

"If it's money you're after, I'll pay you anything!" said the baron, trembling, begging for his life as he thrust enough money at me that it spilled from his two cupped hands. It was always nobles that got assassinated. And they always offered money to save themselves. It was the same in my previous world.

I couldn't help laughing when I realized that.

"What's so funny?" shouted the baron, forgetting the situation he was in the moment something he didn't like happened. That was also the same in my previous world. I'd heard nobles were a cut above the masses, but they were all fools. I never understood what was so special about them.

"Your life is rather cheap, despite all the bragging you may do that you're special," I said.

"What?" The baron's face turned red with anger. It seemed he took that as an insult. He really didn't understand where he stood right now. He didn't have any right to be angry.

*Let's finish this.*

I started with the baron's wife, who tried to slip away while the baron was ranting and raving. She must have assumed I was distracted by the baron, but would I really let her escape during that? Of course not. Fools like that were quickly removed from this world where kill or be killed was a matter of course.

Blood sprayed as she fell because I slit her carotid artery. Her husband's face was half painted in red. I pointed my blade at him as if to say, "You're next."

"Eek, w-wait," he said.

*Wait?*

He makes no sense. His future isn't going to change with a little waiting.

"Instead of me, take my daughter or my son! Whichever you prefer. Actually, no, both! Take both! Just spare my life, please," he begged.

“F-Father...”

“What are you saying, Father?”

“B-Be quiet! You have no right to speak back to me. Worthless brats like you are only valuable because you’re useful for your parents!” ranted the baron.

*He’s a complete and utter fool.*

I raised my blade. “There’s no such thing as true value in this world. Who cares that you’re a noble? Who cares that you’re a parent? Because you contribute to the country? Because you change history? It doesn’t matter. Everyone dies in the end. If life truly has value, then why would our creator take it away? The answer is obvious: nothing actually has value.”

I swung my blade down. Blood gushed from the baron’s neck, and he collapsed. Nobles and kids from the slums were exactly alike when this happened. They all became nothing but a corpse.

“See. You weren’t valuable at all,” I said.

If he was valuable, he wouldn’t die so easily. He would remain in this world forever, so long as he was still valuable. Being eliminated so easily is a reflection of what he truly amounted to. Humans and livestock are equally worthless.

I killed the remaining people, the baron’s son and daughter, then set the mansion on fire.

“The fact that a human life is worthless is proved the moment it can be exchanged for money,” I said to myself. “Nobles are so ridiculous, deciding for themselves how valuable they are then getting angry when someone points out the truth.”

I vaulted the walls surrounding my mansion, making sure no one noticed me, then entered my room through the window. Sia, disguised as me, noticed someone was in the room and approached the window.

“Anything to report?” I asked.

“Your father, Art Violette, came to visit several times.”

“Huh.”

He must be thinking of engaging with me as much as possible. And yet, it'd be perfectly fine if he didn't follow through on that. Art couldn't remain in the mansion at all times because of his work, but he was trying to interact with me as much as possible when he was here.

"Please just go traveling abroad again. Now," I muttered.

It would be best if he never came home again. He was just an annoyance to me, but I did have something convenient that allowed me to evade him: Rosemary.

She would regularly approach him with a smile, saying, "Father, please pay attention to me, too." I would use that as a good opportunity to push Rosemary on Art and run.

Art took an inoffensive attitude with Rosemary. He generally treated her like his own daughter, but Rosemary could also tell that Art didn't truly care for her. She didn't let that stop her, and frankly, her enthusiasm towards Art deserves admiration.

The days like that continued for a while, but it quickly became time for Art to travel abroad again for work. I was relieved—there was one less annoyance for me to deal with—as Amaryllis, Rosemary, and I gathered in the mansion's entrance hall to see Art off.

He smiled at me when I came in. That smile looked to me like he was trying to hold something back. "Selena," he said, "If you ever feel this place becomes difficult for you to live in, just let me know. I will do everything in my power to find an environment easy for you to live in."

And then he hugged me.

I learned something when I was reincarnated: human bodies are warmer than I imagined. That fact itself isn't uncomfortable, but it was uncomfortable to be hugged. I don't think I'll ever get used to that sensation. But a daughter can't very well refuse her father, so I endured it.

"Father, please hug me as well. Please?" pestered Rosemary.

"Oh, the time, I really should be going," said Art. "Amaryllis, if you find yourself in any trouble or are uncertain about anything, write me a letter right

away. I'll write to you."

Art hugged Amaryllis, then patted Rosemary on the head as she repeated, "Please hug me," and set off on his journey with Howard.

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**THE** days following his departure were generally without incident. There was just one annoyance, and that was Rosemary. One day, she shattered my peaceful day by shouting, "Selena stole my necklace!"

The maids, fancying themselves arbiters of justice, entered my room without permission and began a search, where they found Rosemary's necklace.

"Selena, why would you do such a thing?" said Amaryllis with a sigh, her head cocked in confusion. "That caused quite some trouble."

*I should be the one saying that*, I thought. "No one saw me steal it. Why are you claiming I did?" I questioned.

"No one else would do such a thing but you, Lady Selena," said the maid who found the necklace, barging into my conversation with Amaryllis like it was perfectly natural.

"When did you become a member of the duke's family?" I asked. "You're merely a maid, yet you think it's fine to interrupt your mistresses' conversation? You must not be aware of your station. Know your place."

"Selena, you can't divide people up based on status," said Rosemary, stepping forward to block the maid as I criticized her. They make a good duo.

"Why don't you try being a servant and stepping into a conversation between royals without permission," I said. "The servant would lose their head on the spot. And I'm going to say this for all of you who are so lackadaisical: I do not mean that figuratively. The servant would literally, physically lose their head."

The maid blanched and rubbed her neck. She must have imagined it.

"Also, I did not steal our necklace, Rosemary," I said.

"But it just came out of your room," she argued.

"I have no idea how that happened. Perhaps a servant placed it there so you

could play out this little drama. My room is always empty. It would be easy to hide something in there when I wasn't in, and I get the impression plenty of people would help you with that if you asked." I looked at the bystanders watching this unfold, and several of them paled.

"How horrible, you shouldn't accuse people," said Rosemary.

"You accused me first. If accusing people is wrong, then you should cry yourself to sleep rather than do all this unladylike shouting."

Rosemary clung to Amaryllis, fat tears forming in her eyes. She glared at me while Amaryllis consoled her and said, "You're jealous of me; that's why you're always bullying me. All I want is to be friends with you."

"You're incredible, Rosemary," I said. She really does deserve admiration. "You believe there's anything about you worthy of my jealousy?"

Rosemary's eyes widened as much as possible, as if I'd said something unimaginable.

"I am not jealous of you. And I am not bullying you," I stated.

"Are you trying to say I'm not even worth that because I'm a commoner?"

*What? Is she unhappy with that? Does she want to be bullied? Or not? Which is it?*

"You're a noble and a duke's daughter, at that," she said. "You've never had to grow up suffering. That's why you look down on commoners like me. You've never had to drink muddy water. You can't understand the suffering of commoners like us."

I'd asked Rick to look into Rosemary for me. She lived a perfectly normal commoner life. She wasn't incredibly poor, but she wasn't wealthy either. Her family was utterly normal.

The truly poor commoners start their children working when they're young, but that isn't true of normal households like Rosemary's. At ten, they go to school for a year and learn the bare minimum of reading, writing, and simple arithmetic.

In short, to borrow her phrasing, she didn't have to grow up suffering, and



she'd never had to drink muddy water, either.

"Eek! What are you doing?" she shrieked as I grabbed her arm and pulled her off Amaryllis.

"Selena! You mustn't be violent!" cried Amaryllis, her and the servants' faces going pale as they trembled. They must be remembering the time I stabbed the dog with a cake knife.

*How odd.*

It's not like I would kill her. If I were going to kill her, I wouldn't do it in front of people. I'd avoid being caught and do it at night. I would never do it here with all these witnesses.

I jerked Rosemary along by the arm, though she did not want to go, and pulled her outside.

"What? Are you going to throw me out?" she said.

"No."

"Then what are you going to do?!"

It rained the night before, leaving the garden soil soft and puddles scattered here and there. I threw Rosemary into one of those puddles.

"Gagh!"

I sent her diving face first, and the dirty water from yesterday's rain mixed with the garden's dirt splashed into her mouth.

"How is it? Your first taste of muddy water," I said.

Rosemary pushed herself up and tried to spit out the mud in her mouth.

"It's absurd to speak of the taste of muddy water without ever having experienced it yourself. This is something you can only talk to others about once you've tasted it yourself," I said.

As an aside, I do know that flavor. I lived in a slum town in my previous life. I'd gotten sick after drinking muddy water, and I nearly died after eating rotten food.

Rosemary could never imagine what that life was like.

“So? What do you think?” I asked again.

“You’re horrible,” she said.

*Is that what she thinks of me?*

How rude. I was just informing her because she wasn’t aware. Well. Not like she can actually drink muddy water. It’s better for her that she knows, isn’t it? Now, she’ll know not to drink muddy water no matter what situation she finds herself in. She doesn’t have to worry about getting sick like I did.

## Three: The God of Pestilence

**MY** relationship with Rosemary didn't change after that day.

She kept coming at me, trying to paint me as an evil girl while cozying up to everyone in the mansion. I imagine she was trying to make herself look good by casting me in the evil role. It's not a bad strategy. Or, it wouldn't be if she was dealing with anyone other than me. She was probably trying to hide her unsavory past as a commoner-turned-noble.

As a result, not a single servant spoke ill of her for previously being a commoner.

Amaryllis was open-hearted and especially doted on Rosemary, who easily made people like her. Perhaps she saw something of herself in Rosemary. Though, with Amaryllis, it was natural, and with Rosemary, it was just an act.

My relationship with Amaryllis remained one of mutual non-interference. A good relationship, if I do say so myself.

The days and months went on, and Rosemary and I turned twelve.

I was the elder by a few months, but we were the same age. Being the same age as this child was complicated, but a person's environment shapes their mental self and the resources they're born with. There was no connection between a person's mental age and physical age, so I accepted the situation for what it was.

Nothing changed in my life despite turning twelve. I kept having Sia stand in as my doppelganger and taking jobs from Rick.

Something different happened on this job, however.

"What's that?" questioned Rick as he looked suspiciously at the boy I'd brought back with me after the job.

The boy had pitch-black hair and eyes as red as blood. He was good-looking, but a considerable burn scar extended from just below his right eye to his

shoulder.

“He was in the cell below the mansion of my target,” I said.

“And you brought him back with you? Why?” asked Rick.

I didn't respond. I didn't know why. Before I realized it, I was holding my hand out and asking the boy if he wanted to come with me. He looked at my hand, then nodded and took it.





“Black hair and red eyes? No doubt about it,” said Rick. “He’s a remnant of the war tribe.”

The boy jerked when Rick said that. I felt it immediately. We’d kept holding hands ever since he took mine.

“The war tribe?” I asked.

“You don’t know? They’re an aggressive people and have physical capabilities far beyond normal humans. The countries in the region wiped them out for that. This boy must be a survivor.”

“Why was he in a jail cell?” I looked at him, but he turned his face away like he didn’t want to talk about it.

“Based on his age, I’d guess he was just a kid when his tribe was wiped out. He likely barely escaped with his life but got caught and thrown into the slave trade. No way to know where he bounced around, but the person you just killed must’ve owned him.”

The boy glared at Rick, who spoke rather glibly about the whole thing. The rage in the boy’s eyes told me Rick was largely on target, though.

Rick was just making random jabs. He was sometimes nasty in that way.

I got the general idea from Rick’s explanation and the boy’s reaction, but one thing didn’t make sense to me. “But he’s a survivor of this war tribe, right? He has greater physical abilities than normal,” I said. “Shouldn’t he have simply been able to escape if he tried?”

When he was originally captured, he would have been just a child, unable to survive on his own if he did run away. But that was back when he was captured. He’d now grown into a splendid young man. He must have been capable of doing something.

Rick shrugged to say he didn’t know. Rick and I naturally turned to look at the boy.

“I...had nowhere to go if I ran. And...I killed people,” he murmured, his voice as quiet and unsteady as dripping water.

“So what?” I said, but he looked at a loss at what was apparently an

unexpected question.

Rick burst into laughter for some reason.

I continued, "Murder is evil, and saving others is just? Whose values are those? What tripe. What you did saved your life then, didn't it? It kept you alive, right? Let me tell you something funny. Only people who have been protected by and live in a pretty world, who've never had their life threatened, can say anything as pretty as 'killing is wrong.' I'm sure the people who captured you, the slavers who sold you, and all the adults who dealt with you never said that, so that's proof what I say is correct."

I sometimes heard people say killing was wrong in my previous life, as well. Some even pitied me and seemed desperate to fix me.

They lived pretty lives in pretty worlds. None of them had any shame. People as neat and pretty as them only ever shouted pretty little words. They know nothing but their kind, pretty world. They decide on their own that stealing is bad and try to force their values onto others.

They probably never even realize some lives can't be protected like that. It's not like they would do anything for someone who followed their values and then found themselves in danger. What logic was there in going along with such pretty words?

No matter how many times they tried to explain it, I couldn't understand. It's the same now. This boy feels guilty because he killed someone. I can understand that he would do as his slave owners said as a way to pay for his so-called sins. I can understand the situation, but I can't understand the mentality.

After all, anyone who rejects killing lives in a different world from me. We are cut from an entirely different cloth.

I explained to the boy what the reality he was facing was. "That's why there's no salvation. Nowhere," I said. "No one's going to save your life. Neither you nor the adults you interacted with live in that pretty world."

His red eyes looked straight into mine like he was making sure he caught every single one of my words.

"You don't have to force yourself to apologize for killing someone. And you



don't have to embrace it, either. If you hadn't killed someone, you would have been killed. It's just a simple fact."

"Right, so, in short, there's no problem here, yeah?" said Rick in conclusion, wrapping up that conversation. "If you just set him free, he's got nowhere to go, like he said. And I've got a house rule that any trophies brought back by the person doing the job belong to them. Selena, you picked him up. You look after him."

If his physical abilities were greater than average, there should be some use for him. I'd only have to smooth his presence over with Amaryllis, which should be easy considering how flower-brained she was. That was no issue. I was the one to pick him up. I suppose it would only be right for me to take responsibility and care for him.

"I understand," I said.

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**THE** boy's name was Tiegel. I found him collapsed on the ground, wounded. That's what I told Amaryllis, anyway. He said he had nowhere to go, so I hired him as my personal attendant. I may be constantly exasperated by and frustrated with Amaryllis's flower brain, but it did come in handy sometimes.

"Your job will be to take care of things involving me," I said. "Can you read and write?"

Tiegel shook his head.

To be expected. He had been a slave since he was a child.

"All right. I'll teach you. And, well, as you know, I belong to the Dark Guild. I won't ask you to help with my work, but I will ask you to master self-defense and fighting techniques to prepare you in case something does happen."

He nodded rather than said he accepted this. Apparently, I needed to teach him manners, as well. I'd obviously teach him the manners he'd need being an attendant, but I also wanted to teach him manners for being a noble so he could pretend to be one. You never knew when that would be necessary.

"Tiegel, starting today, you are my attendant, which means I have to give you

the education you need so as not to embarrass yourself as the servant of a member of the duke's family. There will be a lot you're not used to in the beginning, and it may be difficult, but please do your best."

He would surely be useful. I was right to pick him up.

That day, I started teaching Tiegel a variety of things. He was a quick study and hard worker, able to pick up whatever I taught him right away.

His talent for the sword and martial arts blossomed immediately. He was the survivor of a war tribe, after all. He could even easily kill me if he wanted to.

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### **Side View: Tiegel**

I generally understood that other people around us hated my tribe. The adults cared for their friends and family, but all other humans weren't even considered human. If anyone outside the tribe approached the settlement, the adults would kill them without hesitating.

That's why God punished us.

Waves of people came at our village, more people than I could count. People were dying, one after another. It was like some picture of hell.

The adults screamed "Kill them!" and rushed at them with weapons. But it didn't matter how strong they were; there was no way they could ever win against that many people. How did they not see that?

"Tiegel, listen, my boy. We are to kill our enemy. You are a man of our proud tribe; you must kill as many as you can," said my mother, then she took her weapon, let out a war cry, and plunged into the enemy line.

My mother was revered among my people for her fierceness in battle, but even she couldn't win against those numbers. Countless swords pierced her body, and her life came to an end.

And still, my people pushed at the enemy. Children like me, who'd been given weapons, imitated the adults. We couldn't possibly win, and running would be better, but no one did that. It was like they were saying the correct thing was to

die in battle.

I couldn't do it. I didn't want to die. The sight of my mother dying was seared into my eyes, and I couldn't move.

*No, I don't want to die like that. I'm scared. Someone help me. Anyone. Anyone, please save me.*

I quieted my breathing and hid in our house.

"Hey, there's another one still in here," came a voice.

"Ack." They found me. I tried to run away.

"Wait!"

I was desperate to run. When they seemed about to catch up to me, I swung the weapon my mother had given me. It just happened that it pierced the throat of the person chasing me.

"Agh!" The man collapsed, blood spurting from the wound.

I killed him.

I don't remember what happened after that. The next thing I knew, I was a product being sold by a slaver. I went all over the place.

"You useless mongrel!"

They threw boiling water on me, kicked me, shut me in a jail cell. That always happened. I just had to sit still and wait for the moment to pass. This is how I atone. I killed a man. My people killed so many others. This is what I get in return.

And then the reaper appeared before me.

"Do you want to come with me?" said the reaper as she extended a hand to me. She looked like a goddess of death.

I took her hand without thinking. It wasn't right to, though. I killed a man. I needed to pay for my sin. But I'd never stopped silently screaming: *Someone, someone, please save me!* I didn't care who; it just repeated in my mind since that day.

And the reaper that appeared before me wasn't a reaper at all; she belonged

to a dark guild. And she was the daughter of a duke. I had no idea why a noble's daughter was an assassin, but...

*"You don't have to force yourself to apologize for killing someone. And you don't have to embrace it, either. If you hadn't killed someone, you would have been killed. It's just a simple fact."*

As she said that, her eyes looked lifeless, as if she wasn't seeing anything in this world. Her aura was an abyss, deeper than any darkness here.

I wanted to force those eyes to see me. I don't know what emotions made me want to do that. I have no idea where that impulse came from, but I wanted to be by her side. I wanted to live in her world. Maybe it was similar to a baby bird imprinting on something to survive. I don't even care if it was.

Selena took me to her mansion and lied to her mother to get her permission to employ me.

"Oh, poor dear. It must have been painful," said this woman named Amaryllis as she gently touched my cheek. Her touch was warm, but, for some reason, I felt far better holding Selena's cold hand, which I had never let go of.

After that, Selena taught me all sorts of things over a long period. It was difficult, but it was a new experience, different from when I was with my tribe or when I was a slave. The most important thing was that it allowed me to be by her side. I was happy to be there. Blessed.

But one thing bothered me.

Selena is the eldest daughter of the duke, a direct descendent of the family line. Yet, everyone in the mansion treasured this former commoner girl with no blood ties to the family and scorned Selena.

"Tiegel, how'd you get that burn scar? Did my sister do that to you? You poor thing," said Rosemary once. She always came to me when Selena wasn't around, babbling away like that. "She's always tormenting me, too. She really is horrible, isn't she?"

*Shut up. You're interfering with my studies.*

"Hey, Tiegel. She's torturing you too, isn't she? We should join together,

then.”

“You seem eager to pick up men, Rosemary,” came a voice.

“Selena?!”

Selena approached me from where she was at the door and picked up the economics book I’d been reading. “You’re making good progress with your studies,” she said.

She complimented me. It made me happy. I was sixteen, and she was twelve. I knew how weird it was to be happy that a girl younger than me complimented me, but Selena was special to me.

“And, unlike him, you ran away from class again, Rosemary. Aina’s looking for you.”

“I didn’t run away,” huffed Rosemary. “I’m just taking a break. Why do you have to say it like that?”

“Well, you seem to spend more time on break than in class. And you’re already behind other girls our age, it seems.”

“Because I’m a commoner. There’s no way I can compare to someone born into a noble family.”

“If noble life doesn’t suit you, I recommend going back to being a commoner. If you don’t like that idea, then work harder. Stop avoiding work and prattling off excuses. And stop disturbing Tiegel’s studies.”

“I was just trying to be nice since we’re both commoners.”

I know I’m a commoner, too, but I didn’t want to think of myself as the same as *her*. My heart strongly rejected the idea.

“It seems you haven’t realized the contradiction in your words and actions,” said Selena. “You are not a commoner. You are the adopted daughter of a duke. How long do you intend to act like a commoner? It won’t be good for you to keep it up forever.”

“You don’t like me. That’s why you’re always bullying me,” said Rosemary, then she rushed from the room in tears. She was almost certainly going to find the shoulder of her mother or some servant to cry on while she told them

Selena was tormenting her.

That's how Selena's poor reputation kept growing. Is she really all right with that? Does she think nothing of being branded with a false reputation and looked down on?

Selena did nothing to improve her reputation. She didn't even try to undo the servants' misinterpretations of her. She just became more and more isolated.

If she stayed isolated like this, alone, then she would belong to no one but me. Can I really have her all to myself like that? It couldn't be wrong, could it?

Others are saying they don't need her, after all. I can have her, then. She extended a hand to me. That means she wants me, doesn't it? And I took her hand because I chose her. No, there's nothing wrong with that.

As I was thinking, Selena muttered caustically, "How bold of her to believe she has anything of value that would make her worth tormenting."

She probably didn't want a response. It seemed more like she was talking to herself, which meant she wouldn't get angry even if I didn't say anything.

Having said that, I know it hadn't been long since I'd met Selena, but I'd never seen her angry. She scolded the servants but only did it to make them understand their place. I honestly didn't think their actions made her angry.

What sort of life had Selena lived? How could someone like her have been raised in a mansion like this filled with such blithe people? I'd never been curious about others before. I became curious about someone the first time I met Selena.

I want to know more about her. I plan to work even harder at my studies and training since Selena seemed like the kind of person who would allow useful people to stay by her side for a long time.

## Four: This Life Never Fits Right, No Matter Where I Go

**AFTER** I turned twelve, tea parties were held all over, partially as practice grounds for noble girls' debut in the social world.

Rosemary and I had to learn manners and etiquette in preparation for this.

Studying that wasn't hard. If I decided I needed something to survive, I only needed to master it. To help us, our family hired Lady Lisbett Rola, wife of Count Rola. She had experience teaching etiquette to the royal family and had built herself significant social standing.

Apparently, Art had used his connections to bring her in, especially to tutor Rosemary. She was also teaching me manners to avoid discrimination between the two of us.

"Lady Selena, you are very capable. You absorb everything I teach you," she said with a smile as she patted my head.

*That was close.*

Because she suddenly touched my head, I nearly pulled out my hidden dagger to cut off her hand before I could think. I can't help it. My body reacts on its own. I've survived places I shouldn't have because of that. But this place is different. I have to get used to this feeling of living in a world where I don't have to kill to survive.

"The Queen will be hosting a tea party soon. I would like you to attend a different tea party beforehand, partially as preparation for the Queen's," said Lisbett as she lined several party invitations out in front of me. Amaryllis didn't actively engage with the social groups, and Art was never in the mansion because he was traveling abroad, meaning the Violette family had little social standing.

However, since we were the house of a duke, we were high-ranking and involved in a variety of businesses, resulting in many invitations from people who wished to connect with us. I obviously wouldn't be attending all of these

tea parties.

At the moment, the royal court was split into the Queen's faction, the Royal Consort's faction, and a neutral faction. The Violette house was neutral. That meant we needed to be cautious of whose parties we attended and who we invited to our parties. If we weren't, either the Queen's or the Royal Consort's faction would take the duke's assets, something they both had their eyes on. If that happened, we couldn't avoid being dragged into the fight for the throne.

Lisbett and I worked together to carefully choose which tea party I should attend. As you might expect, we selected one being hosted by a neutral party.

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I attended the party in a pale-yellow dress with bared shoulders and elegant fake flowers decorating the bodice.

As an aside, Rosemary was meant to attend the tea party, but Lisbett didn't give her permission to since she hadn't mastered the bare minimum level of manners necessary.

"How unfortunate," said one of the many young ladies in front of me, all with disgusting smirks on their faces. The one who spoke was Lady Sienna Rodwell, daughter of Marquess Rodwell. Her most distinctive feature was her ash-brown hair with curled tips. She was in the Royal Consort's faction.

We had set seats at this tea party, and she and I were at the same table.

"Lady Selena, I heard your family took in a girl who had no connection with your house. I was so looking forward to meeting her today, but it seems she's not here. Did something happen?"

She was essentially saying, "It's not like you'd bring along a lowly commoner, right? She'd only embarrass your house. What is wrong with you that you'd accept someone like that into your house?"

Nobles are such a pain. Stop being so roundabout; just say what you mean. It doesn't matter how prettily you dress something up. If the inside is still ugly, it will never be beautiful.

"I'm so very sorry," I said. "Rosemary was meant to attend but wasn't feeling



well today.”

“I’m not surprised. She must not have been able to sleep well from the nerves.”

AKA: “This social standing is too much for a lowly commoner. Make sure she knows where she stands.”

Apparently, Sienna forgot who exactly she was talking to.

“Perhaps. She is a rather delicate girl,” I said. “But she is the daughter of a duke. I’m sure she’ll be interacting freely with everyone soon.”

Even if she was a former commoner, she was a member of the duke’s household now. I used a roundabout way as appropriate for nobles to tell Sienna that a lower-ranking noble like her had no right to speak on the matter, and she clamped her mouth shut and glared at me.

Perhaps she remembered she was from a marquess’s family, and I was from a duke’s. However, her thinking didn’t get so far as to realize that glaring at me was also a faux pas.

Nobles are a privileged class. They receive a higher level of education than commoners. We may be only twelve, but she still seems a little too stupid.

It didn’t stop there.

“Lady Sienna, that’s such a wonderful dress you’re wearing,” I said.

It was a white dress with lace layered over the skirt and sprays of mimosa flowers decorating the bodice and right shoulder. She also had a mimosa choker around her neck, likely bought as a set with the dress.

“Thank you, Lady Selena; I’m not surprised you can tell a good dress when you see it.” She leaned back to proudly show it off more, seemingly forgetting the tension from a moment before. “It’s a special dress made of silk.”

“Silk? From Muspel?” said another girl.

“Lady Luna, of course someone from a provincial region blessed with good trade would have expert knowledge. Yes, from Muspel. I just love how this fabric feels, so I have Father buy me a dress whenever I attend a tea party.”

Luna Phoebe, the girl who joined the conversation, was the daughter of a lord of a border region, meaning the “provincial” comment wasn’t off the mark but was rude. One of the more powerful border counts rivaled a marquess in status, meaning it was not appropriate to treat her with the same level of respect you’d treat most counts.

Even though Luna would be well within her right to be angry at Sienna for her lack of decorum, Luna responded with a pleasant smile. Everyone around them let out a tense sigh when they saw her mature reaction.

Luna didn’t seem like a strong-willed person.

“Lady Luna, that’s a unique dress you have,” I said.

Luna looked down, uneasy about the conversation, turning to her, and said, “Thank you,” in an incredibly quiet voice. “It was actually purchased from Tellasia.”

A dress from abroad?

Imported dresses had to come in by ship, meaning it would be more expensive than a domestically produced dress. Sienna had said only a moment ago that Luna’s family was blessed with good trade. They must have enough private funds that purchasing a dress from abroad wasn’t a significant issue.

And what about Sienna?

Her family was in the arms business. They would be selling weapons like hotcakes in days past when the country was at war, but Astra was currently at peace. They likely only sold a weapon here and there to the knights.

They also weren’t allowed to sell weapons to foreign countries because of the risk of those countries turning those weapons against Astra. Selling weapons to a foreign country was a death sentence.

I hadn’t heard anything about the Rodwells undertaking new business, meaning their income would only keep falling. I found it hard to believe they had the excess funds to purchase cloth from abroad for a dress—and a silk one at that, the best cloth Muspel produced. There was no way they could do that for every tea party Sienna attended.

It would be possible for my family, who engaged with several different industries, or perhaps for the family of Lady Abella Albania. She was the daughter of a viscount and had been listening to the conversation. Despite being only a viscount, her family owned several mines, meaning their wealth rivaled that of most high-ranking nobles.

Perhaps the Rodwells have dirty money in their coffers.

Meaning that Rick may do something soon. He was the head of the Dark Guild, but even that was a front. His real duty was likely to use the cover of darkness to eliminate those who might harm the kingdom.

If Marquess Rodwell was selling weapons to other countries, that information should not be made public. It would have too large a negative impact on the country. He'll likely be killed, with it made to look like a robbery. Strings will be pulled so some distant relatives step in to carry on the marquess title. Whoever takes over the title will be told the truth about what happened and remain under surveillance.

I might as well not involve myself with Sienna anymore. It's not like I'll be seeing her again.

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**THIS** tea party was a practice run for the tea party the queen would be having, meaning most of the invited girls were around the same age. They were all parrying each other's jabs, fighting to prove *they* were best suited to marry the crown prince.

One aspect of that was using clothing to inform everyone else exactly how much money our families had.

Compliments hid barbs and snide remarks, a tedious part of nobility.

I was exhausted by the time I got back to our mansion.

"Are you all right?" asked Tiegel. He prepared a cup of tea for me after I sank low into the settee in my room. He'd really come into his own as an attendant.

"I'm fine," I said. Maybe it was because I wasn't used to that sort of thing. I did not enjoy those gatherings. Assassination was much more pleasant. I drank

the tea Tiegel made me and relaxed, but clomping footfalls rushed down the hallway toward my room. I rolled my eyes.

We had the same teacher; we'd learned the same things. Why could she not learn how to comport herself as a lady? I know I was born into a noble family in this world, but I'd been a slum rat in my previous one. In that way, I think Rosemary and I were essentially in the same situation.

"Shall I send her away?" asked Tiegel, looking at the door, having guessed based on the sound who was coming.

She tried to open the door without even knocking. "Huh? What? Why won't it open? Selena! It's me, Rosemary. Open the door!"

It wasn't locked. Tiegel was just holding the doorknob and keeping it closed.

"Selena! Open the door! Don't be mean!" Rosemary slammed the door.

"Open it," I said.

Tiegel reluctantly opened the door, and Rosemary, who wasn't expecting the door to open, went sprawling on the floor. Tiegel did it on purpose. That's how much he seemed to dislike Rosemary entering.

He was four years older than me. Seeing this sort of childish behavior from him once in a while made me feel like he was the younger one. Well, I have my memories from my previous world, meaning if you included the number of years I lived there, my mental age was higher than his.

"Are you all right, Rosemary?" I asked.

"Why do you always bully me like this?" she accused, standing up, tears in her eyes as she glared at me. Her forehead and nose were red. Her face must have slammed into the floor.

"I'm not bullying you," I said. "You were the one attempting to enter someone's room without permission. Did you learn that in Lady Lisbett's lessons?"

Rosemary didn't say anything. She went silent the moment things weren't going in her favor.

"Anyway, why did you come to my room?" It probably wasn't for anything

good, but it was an inconvenience to have her hanging around.

“You went to the tea party today, didn’t you?” said Rosemary, immediately regrouping herself as she scrunched her skirt in her fists and glared at me. There were tears in her eyes. Anyone who didn’t know us and saw this wouldn’t be insane to jump to the conclusion that I was terrorizing her.

“I did. What of it?”

“How horrible! I know I used to be a commoner, but I’m a duke’s daughter now. How could you leave only me out? Are you that embarrassed to introduce me to everyone?”

She seemed to think it was my fault she couldn’t attend the tea party, as if I’d put my foot down and made it so she couldn’t go.

“You’re the one who didn’t work hard enough to pass Lady Lisbett’s test,” I said.

“You’re wrong! I did everything I could!”

“Then it’s not the effort that’s lacking.”

“You were born and raised a noble. You can’t understand what it feels like to be me!” she shouted and then started sobbing.

*Oh, how annoying.*

I should have killed her before Amaryllis adopted her.

“You seem to like belittling your own birth and upbringing, Rosemary,” I said. “Do you want me to pity you? Or do you want me to call you an idiot?”

Rosemary cried even louder. A servant suddenly noticed her sobs and came to console her while another went to get Amaryllis.

Tiegel didn’t seem to like this situation. He looked at me, his eyes saying, “Should I kill her?” He likely would have torn her throat out by now if there wasn’t anyone there.

“Rosemary, dear,” said Amaryllis.

“M-Mother, Selena’s bullying me.”

Amaryllis had come running when the servant went to fetch her. The moment

she stepped into the room, she threw her arms around Rosemary and rubbed her back, calming her sobs. It was like they were the real mother and daughter.

Not much I could do about that, really.

Rosemary was a former commoner among nobles, a fake in her own way. I had the memories of an assassin from another world, making me fake in my own way as well. But my ethical beliefs were too far from theirs. I was the foreign one here. That's why Amaryllis avoided me.

And, for as much as Amaryllis avoided me, she used Rosemary to fill the void I left.

It was a mistake for someone like me to be born as her daughter. The priests used to say you would be granted a wonderful life in your next incarnation if you did good in this life. Clearly, everything they said was a lie. If that were true, I never would have been born Amaryllis's daughter. This life I took up is a failure. If there is a god, they've made a grave miscalculation.

"Selena, why can't you get along with Rosemary?" said Amaryllis. She wasn't blaming me. Her expression looked like she didn't know how to scold her troublesome child.

Honestly, if she's so uncertain, it would just be faster to kill me. That's what I would do. I mean, look how difficult it is for her to deal with someone like me. I basically just get in her way.

If Amaryllis would just act, it would be easier for me to act as well. I've failed to fully become a normal person for this long. I have no idea where the cutoff is, which makes it hard for me to make any moves.

"I don't think it's possible," I said. "I have no inclinations to be friendly with someone who seems to have no intentions of being friendly towards me."

"Why are you saying it like it's my fault?" said Rosemary. "All I'm trying to do is be friends with you." She shot daggers at me with her eyes, still clinging to Amaryllis. There was real hostility in that look. She likely had the ulterior motive of isolating me from everyone and then trying to take my position for herself.

However, if that was her goal, she should have worked hard and shown results that Lisbett couldn't complain about.

*I really, seriously want to kill her. Right now.*

“You tried to enter my room without knocking and without permission. You couldn’t attend the tea party because you failed to pass Lady Lisbett’s test, but instead of acknowledging it was the result of a lack of effort on your part, you tried to blame me for it. You’re saying none of that was done maliciously? I absolutely cannot believe that you want to be friends with me. If you truly want to be on good terms with me, you need to reconsider your actions.”

Rosemary fell silent.

In her place, Amaryllis said, “There is clearly some sort of misunderstanding between you two. I know you may not be blood, but you are sisters. Let’s do our best to get along. I will be so sad if you can’t find a way to be friends.”

It probably wasn’t appropriate to ask, “Why?” here. Even if Rosemary and I were sisters by blood, what does it matter? Amaryllis’s mood has no connection to our relationship, good or bad.

People eliminate their blood relatives, sisters, brothers, parents, and even children for profit. There is no cause-and-effect relationship between blood and whether or not you can or should build a good relationship with someone.

However...

“I understand, Mother,” I said. “I will do everything I can to do as you wish.”

*That’s probably the right answer.*

I looked at Amaryllis and Rosemary. Rosemary did not look happy at all. Her expression clearly said, “Who in the world do you think would be friends with you?” That wasn’t unexpected.

Amaryllis looked incredibly uncertain, as if she wasn’t sure what to do. *Why? Was my answer wrong? What’s the correct answer, then? I have no idea.*

“Is that all?” I said. “I’m tired after the tea party. I’d like to have my meal in my room.”

“...Of course,” said Amaryllis, and she took Rosemary with her out of my room. The crowd of servants went back to their various jobs.

Fatigue weighed heavily on me. I sat on the settee, drinking the fresh cup of

tea Tiegel poured me, but my emotions wouldn't settle. I kept thinking about what had just happened.

It would certainly have been wrong to voice my question then. I'd thought it was the right move to agree with Amaryllis's opinion. I'm certain it wasn't wrong. But it wasn't right either, based on Amaryllis's reaction.

"Are you thinking about what just happened?" asked Tiegel.

*Maybe he would know the answer.*

"You're a strange person, Lady Selena. This mansion is a peaceful place. Someone like you should never have come from a place like this, with any normal upbringing."

*Likely true.*

It was simply horrifying that a flower-brained woman could raise a daughter in a pretty world like this, entirely removed from conflict, and end up with an assassin.

"Does Rosemary resemble her more as a daughter?" I asked.

"I wonder." He cocked his head and thought. He seemed to be thinking about Rosemary. "I'm hesitant to say she resembles Amaryllis in that she lacks the manners and elegance of a noble."

*Hm.*

I'd thought she was a perfect fit for Amaryllis, but apparently, others looking into the situation couldn't see her as Amaryllis's daughter either.

Well, I would hate to have two of them, so maybe that's for the best.

"And regarding what just happened," said Tiegel. "Your answer that you would go along with Amaryllis's hopes that you would get along wasn't wrong. I think it was more a matter of how you said it. I think if you wish to blend into this mansion more, a softer way of saying things would be better. It felt rather cold and standoffish."

*Ah. So, it's the delivery.*

"And you're fine not asking any questions about how abnormal I am for this



place?” I said.

“Well. It’s not really an issue for me. I don’t care who you are. I intend to serve you regardless.”

“...I see.”

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**ONE** morning, while sipping my morning tea, I skimmed the newspaper Tiegel brought me. In it, I saw an announcement of the deaths of the Rodwell family.

As I expected, they were engaged in the secret sale of weapons.

However, they were a high-ranking noble family, and their influence would be considerably greater if they were tried publicly, so the official story was that they were killed in a burglary. In reality, Rick had asked me to kill the marquess and his wife.

Sienna, their daughter, wasn’t involved with the illegal sales and, therefore, escaped punishment, but the public was told she also died in the burglary. Her name was changed, and she was sent to a convent.

The royal family allowed the now-late Marquess Rodwell’s younger brother to take over the Rodwell Marquessate, and he was to remain under surveillance. That happened a few days after the tea party.

## Five: It's the Prince's Fault the Fierce Beast Failed to Kill Its Prey

**ROSEMARY'S** classes dragged on for one simple reason: she was not a serious student. She hated studying. She'd use the "I'm a commoner" excuse at the drop of a hat.

She constantly told everyone around, including Amaryllis, that Lisbett was hard on her, that Lisbett was especially strict with her because she was a commoner, and that Lisbett had held her back from passing the class out of spite even though her manners were impeccable.

Lisbett informed Amaryllis of Rosemary's attitude towards her classes. Amaryllis didn't outright refuse to believe what Lisbett said, but she still treated Rosemary gently. That resulted in Rosemary being spoiled by Amaryllis without even obtaining the bare minimum of knowledge required of a noblewoman.

"I have nothing to teach a student with no desire to learn," said Lisbett eventually, giving up entirely on Rosemary, which is when Amaryllis finally did something.

"Rosemary, dear, the Queen's tea party is coming up. There will be two princes there. It's very important. The princes' fiancées will be chosen there. It would be very bad if you acted inappropriately. Please make sure you learn what Lady Lisbett is teaching you."

That was when Rosemary first put any effort into Lisbett's classes.

"Maybe I can marry a prince," she said, her eyes sparkling.

Amaryllis, hesitant to shatter a child's dreams, replied, "That would be wonderful, wouldn't it?"

Though, I believe the correct response here would be, "That's impossible."

She may be the daughter of a duke, but she was still a commoner by blood. She didn't have noble blood, let alone the duke's blood. There was no way

someone like that would marry into royalty. Lisbett made sure to drill that into Rosemary during her lessons.

But Rosemary didn't take the lesson seriously. She wouldn't remember. She engaged seriously in the classes with that faint hope in her heart.

And she just barely passed the test to attend the tea party. Just barely, though, and just barely within the time limit, meaning she was to attend the tea party without having gone to any other parties for practice.

The day of the tea party finally came.

This tea party acted as a social debut for us young ladies and a grounds for selecting the princes' fiancées and close retainers. The two princes were coming as the Queen hosted this event. Besides me, all the noble girls worked themselves into a frenzy, dressing as nicely as possible to catch a prince's eye.

"Maybe I could... Perhaps I-I might marry a prince, too," said Rosemary, her eyes sparkling, though she still didn't seem used to speaking like a lady.

*No way. Not you.*

The status system of this world was the same as my previous one. It didn't matter if she was adopted into a noble family; no prince would go out of his way to select a former commoner.

Besides, the Violette family may have duke status, but our social connections were weak. Father was always traveling abroad for the various businesses he engaged in. He didn't perform any court duties, meaning he wasn't close with the royal family.

He came from a line with little to worry about, has no ambition, and has as much social standing as a lower noble who takes it easy.

"S-Selena, let's go over and see the princes," said Rosemary.

I shifted my eyes from her over to the princes. A thick wall of people surrounded them, engaged in a battle of allure.

Both noble girls and boys wore perfume. They used different types, but the mixed scents did not make for a pleasant smell, even when each was fine individually.

"I'd rather not," I said. "If you wish to go, you may. Alone."

"What?! But, me? Alone?"

*Does she not want to?*

She must've wanted me to come because she was uneasy. Maybe her life seemed like a dream to her, even now, which was why she wanted to move on to the next dream, but she couldn't summon the courage to go after it. That was the sort of thing I read from her. I didn't feel any need to accompany her.

I looked at the princes again. I got the impression I made eye contact with one of them, but I ignored it and moved to a corner of the garden.

"Selena," said Rosemary.

"I'm tired. I'd like to rest a little. Do whatever you like. Have fun."

I left her and moved into the shadow of a tree. There were too many people. It was tiring.

"You, there," said a voice filled with hostility. If something that cutesy could be hostile.

In front of me was a small girl with blond hair wearing a vibrant red dress with black lace trim. I could tell immediately from her voice and sharply angled eyes that she was a strong-willed lady. We were just meeting, yet she seemed hostile towards me for some reason.

"There are princes here, and you're not even attempting to get close to them. Isn't that rude?" she said. "Or are you trying to stand out by doing something different from everyone else? How disgraceful. Exactly what I would expect from someone with a commoner upbringing."

*It seems she's mistaken me for Rosemary.*

I glanced around, searching for Rosemary, and saw her advancing directly toward the throng of ladies trying to woo the princes.

Does she really think she'll become engaged with a prince? No matter how idiotic they are, they would never choose a former commoner like her without a single drop of noble blood in her, even if she is the daughter of a duke now. She wouldn't even make it into the pool of potential candidates, let alone make it to

marrying one of them.

What in the world did she learn from Lisbett?

I hope she avoids starting something so I don't get dragged into an annoying situation. On the other hand, it would be nice if she started something so big that I had reason to eliminate her.

"Hello, are you listening to me?" said the small girl in front of me.

Right. What to do with this annoying little birdie? I shouldn't kill her, should I? It would end up the same as when I stabbed Bruce. Speaking of which, while Bruce had been wary at first, he's now friendly with the people of the mansion. Not with me, though. Likely because I stabbed him.

"Lady Scarlanette, I think this commoner simply knows her place. I mean, just look at her. She clearly doesn't belong," said another girl.

*So, this tacky girl in the red dress is named Scarlanette?*

I recalled Lisbett's chart of nobles and their power relationships. If I remembered correctly, Scarlanette was the daughter of Count Jordan. I was higher in station. She seemed to think she was higher, though, because she assumed I was a commoner.

What a crude way of thinking. Even if I were a former commoner, I would now be the daughter of Duke Violette, meaning I had a duke at my back. It was not acceptable to insult the daughter of a duke.

*Not that I care, though.*

But all these people chirping around me are seriously annoying.

I can't do it here; it'll cause a mess. Maybe I'll kill her in secret later. I'm sure she'll come after me again if I don't, which means it'd definitely be better to kill her off now. It's fine as long as it doesn't get out.

Is just killing her enough? Or should I kill her whole little entourage?

I looked at the ladies around Scarlanette. There were four. Killing four people would be fine. I can ask Rick to have the Dark Guild take care of the bodies.

"Excuse *me*, are you listening to me?!"

I've decided what to do; I just need to act. She's an idiot, deciding I'm a commoner based on incomplete information, not bothering to check anything for herself. And assuming someone is weaker than her just because they're a commoner. She thinks she's on the hunt, and there's a rabbit in front of her.

No authority, no status, no money. In those aspects, yes, commoners are in weaker positions than nobles. But a person in a weak position does not necessarily a weak person make.

What's so strong about a doll who has been given everything as if it were her right, shut up in a prison called a mansion, and grown up entirely incapable of doing anything on her own? I don't get it at all.

I may not get it, but I understand how she thinks and what she would do. I killed enough nobles for a lifetime in my last world. That meant I've seen what nobles are truly made of.

These idiots are convinced I'm weak, and they're strong, which means they'll immediately accept my suggestion. They have no idea they're the rabbits being hunted.

"Yes, I'm listening," I said. "But, would you mind if we went somewhere else? I feel like we stand out just a little too much here." I cast my eyes enough that they could see. They followed my gaze. It didn't seem like they'd noticed earlier, but several people had taken notice of us.

There was a silver lining in this situation, though. Scarlanette and her entourage had surrounded me, meaning no one else could see me. That meant I didn't have to worry about being suspected if anything did happen to them. After all, I was meeting Scarlanette for the first time today. From everyone else's perspective, we've never interacted. Scarlanette would never be satisfied unless she was number one, so she only let ugly girls accompany her.

And the girls with her would obviously not be enamored with Scarlanette. It was a connection for status or family. Scarlanette also looked down on those she perceived as lower than her, believing it was only normal for them to work on her behalf. No one would enjoy being with someone like that.

Maybe I should leave one of them alive, then. I can make them out to be the murderer.

“Oh, quite perceptive for a commoner,” said Scarlanette. “Fine. Follow me.”

I can't believe she's starting a personal squabble at the Queen's tea party. She's got some nerve. All right. How should I kill her? It's not like I have any significant grudge against her, so maybe I'll just stab her in the heart.

Oh, but no noble girl could do that. I have to make the murder look like the girl I'm going to pin this on could've done it. Right. Then, stab her in a couple of different places until she dies? Or maybe stab her over and over to make it look like a grudge killing?

There're too many options. It's hard to choose just one. Hm. Which one? I want something that doesn't put suspicion on me, something that seems natural.

“Excuse me, do you have a moment?” a pleasant voice said, calling Scarlanette and the others to a halt.

“What is it?” shouted Scarlanette in anger as she turned to the owner of the voice. Then, her cheeks blushed crimson and she let out a squeal. She swayed her hips and purred like a kitten.

*This is unpleasant.*







The voice belonged to Evan, the eldest prince of Astra.

“What can I do for you, Your Highness?” she asked.

He was an attractive young man with a brisk and friendly attitude. His small smile made people like him; he was the sort of prince who gave a good first impression.

But the smile didn’t reach his eyes.

The girls didn’t notice the lack of warmth in his gaze.

In my previous life, I’d interacted with noble ladies a lot when their husbands hired me to kill them or when they hired me. One thing I learned from that is that they are quite oblivious to what other people feel about them.

It’s kind of comedic, actually, how they don’t even notice and still act pleasantly with the other person.

“I was wondering what this gathering was about,” said the prince.

“I was going to teach this commoner the manners of noble society,” said Scarlanette. She was likely trying to convince him how kind she was, but it just sounded like she admitted to terrorizing me. It would be one thing if it were just her and me, but there’s no way that would fly when her group is surrounding one person.

“Commoner?” said the prince, leaning over slightly to see me. His blue eyes looked directly at me. “I think you may be under some misconception. She is no commoner.”

“What?” Scarlanette and her friends froze.

Well, the real former commoner, Rosemary, was wearing a dress way more flamboyant than mine. It’s not that surprising that they mistook me for her with the plain dress I was wearing.

“You are Lady Selena Violette, correct? Is everything all right?” asked the prince.

“Everything is fine, Your Highness,” I said. “They are all being terribly kind to me.”

“Well, that’s good then.”

*It’s not good at all. It’s your fault for stepping in that I won’t be able to kill them.*

“Oh, Selena, what’s happening?” asked Rosemary, bouncing out from behind the prince.

*She has no manners, interrupting the prince’s conversation. What in the world is Amaryllis teaching her?*

“Your Highness,” she said, “did my sister do something rude?”

“...No.”

Rosemary’s the one doing something rude. Right now. Present tense. Barging into his conversation and talking to him without permission. She might lose her head.

“As Lady Scarlanette says, we are quite lacking in the manners necessary for noble society,” I said. “We were not in a state to be able to attend this tea party. You have my sincerest apologies. If you’ll allow us to excuse ourselves...”

“Huh, Selena? We just got here,” said Rosemary.

“Excuse us, Your Highness,” I said with a ladylike curtsy, then I grabbed Rosemary’s arm and dragged her out of the party, though she tried to stay.

She kept crying out, “Ow, you’re hurting me!” and “But I haven’t even had any cake yet!” It was hard to believe she was a noble lady. I knew making a commoner a noble’s adopted daughter was impossible. Not that I had any right to say that.

If Amaryllis pitied Rosemary, she could have hired her as a servant. She would have done fine as a grunt servant whose job didn’t involve interacting with nobles. She’s a child. Amaryllis might not have realized that because she felt bad for the girl, but throwing her into noble society with all its dangers was like throwing a kitten into a pride of lions.

And it’s turned out this bad because she hasn’t even properly learned manners. She’s going to embarrass the duke and his family in front of these nobles and royals.

“OH, you’re back early!” Amaryllis greeted us when we arrived at the mansion, though she was surprised.

“Mother, just listen; I barely had time to talk to my friends, and I hadn’t eaten any cake at all, and Selena made me come home. She’s so unsocial it’s a disaster!” said Rosemary as she clung to Amaryllis and sobbed.

Amaryllis said, “There, there,” as she patted her gently on the head. “Selena isn’t like you, Rosemary. She’s very shy. It must be hard on her to be somewhere like a tea party with all those people. But, Selena, you can’t keep avoiding it just because you don’t like it. Particularly today. It wasn’t just you there; it was Rosemary, too. Rosemary wants lots of friends, isn’t that right?”

“Yeah,” said Rosemary.

*But that’s impossible.* Lots of people wanted in with the duke’s family, meaning there were likely people who moved close to Rosemary because they decided she was tactically easy to deal with, but those relationships wouldn’t last long. Not with her personality.

While everyone may think of her as the adopted daughter of a duke, they still looked down on her for being a commoner, even as they tried to become close to her. That’s why Rosemary should be acting like the absolute perfect duke’s daughter, with not a single minuscule crack in her defenses.

“I don’t like being out in the social sphere either, so I understand how you feel, Selena,” said Amaryllis. “But let’s try to be more social. It’s lonely not to have any friends.”

My head ached from Amaryllis’s completely off-the-mark assumptions.

“The problem has nothing to do with any sort of shyness on my part,” I said. “The biggest problem is that Rosemary still doesn’t have the bare minimum of manners necessary for a tea party. Please make sure she learns that as soon as possible.”

Rosemary pouted the moment I pointed out the real issue. “What are you saying? I used to be a commoner, after all.”

“But now you’re the daughter of a duke. And as such, that excuse is no longer sufficient. If you don’t like it, remove yourself from the family and go back to a commoner life. Father can use his connections to find you a job. You could even work in the mansion as a maidservant.”

With that suggestion, tears gathered in Rosemary’s eyes, and she sobbed loudly. “How horrible! You’re basically telling me to go die!”

“I never mentioned it in the slightest. There are children your age working, even if they have no parents. I just told you we could find you work. It’s not like I’m telling you to live in the slums.”

“You’ve never had to live as a commoner. You can only say that because you don’t know how painful it is.”

*I know it far better than you do.*

I might be the daughter of a duke in this world, having never known hard work, but I was an assassin in my previous world. I was never even given a name. I never met my parents. I lived never knowing love or the warmth of a home. I had been so hungry I doubled over in pain. I thought I would starve to death on several occasions. I was subjected to violence many times.

Rosemary, after your mother died, Amaryllis immediately found you and took you in. You’ve never had to huddle with others in the slums. You’ve never been pushed to the brink of starvation. *You’re* the one who doesn’t know how painful it is.

You just don’t want to lose your current life of luxury.

I looked at Rosemary as she sobbed loudly in Amaryllis’s arms.

She is a poison to our family. She pities herself, others simply spoiling her. She wants to be loved but has no drive to improve herself. The only strong desire she has is to be the center of attention.

“It’s unfair I have to be treated like this just because I was born in a different place,” shouted Rosemary through her tears.

A former commoner was not going to be treated as a noble. It’s a fact of life. Humans are tribal animals. Those sorts of animals have a visceral loathing of

anything different. But, if she works hard, she could get people to accept her.

She won't even put in that effort, though. It's careless to explode like this just because people shun her.

"Unfair?" I said. "When has the world ever been fair? Life is unfair. Everything is decided by the environment you were born and raised in. Even if someone is an incredible genius, being an orphan is enough to keep that talent from ever blossoming. To have it buried. What are you asking of a world like that?"

Slum children can't get decent jobs because everyone assumes they're all thieves. It's the parents' duty to bear and care for their children, but some are abandoned like some unnecessary object, meaning they're abandoned by the world like some unnecessary object.

"The nobles will not accept you," I said. "If you want to live as a noble, you have to put in enough effort to make them accept you. Just saying 'I used to be a commoner' won't work. It's a reason for them to look down on you. It's not something that will make them feel sympathy towards you. You cannot stay in the duke's family as you are. Mother is kind and will likely allow you to stay, but what about Father?"

Art had only returned to the mansion once since Rosemary had been adopted. She must be remembering that time because her expression soured.

"Selena, regardless of all this, Rosemary has been through a lot. She's just not used to this environment yet. Please look at the long term," said Amaryllis as she soothed Rosemary.

*And here I thought there was a limit to how flower-brained someone could be.*

"She disrespected a prince at the tea party," I said. "I can only pray that the 'long term' isn't the fall of our family."

I went back to my room since I couldn't handle dealing with them anymore.

As I went, servants whispered, "Oh, she's so cold," and "How could such kind parents give birth to such a heartless girl?"

Apparently, the servants were also morons. Both the residents and servants of this mansion were incredibly blessed.

“How peaceful,” I muttered, but there was no one to hear my sarcasm.

## Six: A Tricky Opponent

**“ENGAGED? Rosemary?”**

“Yes.”

The day after the tea party, Amaryllis told me something absurd while we ate breakfast.

“It’s not official yet, but the other party is very interested,” she said.

They must not have heard about her disgraceful behavior at the party even though everyone was focused on it.

“Mother, I don’t want to devote myself to someone I’ve never met before,” said Rosemary.

*But that’s basically what noble arranged marriages are.*

“I know, dear, but you can say no if you meet him, spend some time with him, and realize it’s not a good fit.”

“Oh, all right.”

If it was someone she could turn down, it must be someone with the same status or lower.

Well, no. Definitely not someone of the same rank. I don’t think anyone above the rank of a count would want to marry *her*. There were concerns that her horrifying behavior yesterday angered several influential nobles. A wise man would never play with that fire. That meant the proposal had to come from someone who wanted a tie to our family, even if it meant taking on some risk. That likely had to do with business, as our family was involved in several different industries.

And the fact they went with Rosemary, the younger sibling, rather than me, meant he likely would be the heir to a title. So, who at yesterday’s tea party was a lower noble but with family connections to business...?



As my mind was working, trying to determine who could possibly want to wed Rosemary, Amaryllis said something insane. I nearly spit out my tea, but forced it down instead, which resulted in me choking quite a bit.

“Excuse me, Mother, what did you just say?” I asked.

“The person who asked for Rosemary’s hand in marriage is Prince Heinrich, the second prince.”

*Impossible.*

I stood so forcefully that I knocked my chair over. “Are you actually thinking of accepting? That would be insane!”

“Oh, my, Selena, why are you so upset? The royal family has taken notice of our family. You should be happy.”

“Yeah, Selena, don’t be jealous that he *chose* me,” said Rosemary.

Amaryllis looked confused. Rosemary smiled in triumph.

*They don’t understand anything.*

“Mother, you just said it, didn’t you, that they can meet several times, and she can turn down the proposal if they don’t match, yes? Do you seriously believe you can turn down a prince? It’s a huge disgrace to have a formalized engagement dissolved. Noble society already won’t accept her because she used to be a commoner. Do you really think they will after she’s seen as even worse damaged goods? It would never happen.

“And there are unflattering rumors about Prince Heinrich’s conduct. His mother is the king’s consort and quite ambitious. She’s trying to eliminate Prince Evan and place Prince Heinrich on the throne. Do you understand what that means? An engagement to Prince Heinrich means, without a doubt, that we, as a family, are involved in that whole affair. In the fight for the throne. The Violettes don’t have the power to hold our own in that maelstrom! You must refuse the proposal. At the very least, you shouldn’t accept it while Father is away.”

But my objections made no difference. Rosemary was officially engaged to Heinrich.

**DUKE** Violette was involved in a wide variety of industries and held significant wealth. That's what the Royal Consort had her eyes on. And it seemed good for the King that we had little influence on those in the court, and our words held little weight socially. Accidentally selecting someone with too much power as the second prince's fiancée would only increase how fierce the fight for the throne became. That's why the King approved Rosemary's betrothal to Heinrich.

I hadn't anticipated there would be someone so stupid they'd want to marry Rosemary. It likely wasn't about her looks. She was average-looking. Not quite plain, perhaps even closer to cute than not. But a lot of nobles had attractive features. Rosemary was doomed to be overshadowed by them once she joined their ranks.

Rosemary was probably chosen because Amaryllis doted on her more than me. They must have thought by choosing Rosemary, they could get Amaryllis to do more for them, making her easier to handle.

Rick had mentioned to me before that the Royal Consort was very elitist, however, meaning she likely wouldn't allow Rosemary to bear the prince's firstborn. Actually, she'd probably have Rosemary killed before that even happened once she was finished with her.

In this case, "being finished with her" meant Heinrich becoming heir apparent and the Royal Consort having complete control of the court and nobles. If that happened, it wasn't just Rosemary she'd get rid of. The entire Violette family would go with her.

"This is terrible," I sighed.

There was no avoiding the Violette family getting dragged into the struggle for the throne. I didn't know if Heinrich himself wanted to be king, but those sorts of fights rarely considered those kinds of feelings. People surrounding the potential heirs always started them.

"I'll pack and get out of here immediately," I decided.

I could easily throw away this life if it meant protecting myself. And it wasn't

like I was just a clueless noble girl. I had the skills to survive as something other than a lady.

“Tiegel, we’re leaving.”

I quickly packed my things and took Tiegel with me out the window since things would get complicated if the servants saw me. My room was on the second floor, but I was an assassin once. Jumping down was easy. Then, I moved from the veranda towards the garden’s trees. It was easy to escape the mansion.

“Huh, that’s an interesting entrance,” came a voice.

Tiegel immediately stepped in front of me to shield me. I looked around his back to see who spoke, then sighed in frustration.





*Am I cursed?*

I'd climbed a tree to jump the wall and landed on the road outside the mansion. Everything was fine up until that point. But, unluckily, a carriage passed me and stopped, and Evan stepped out.

"Are you going somewhere? I can take you if you'd like," the first prince said.

"I appreciate the offer, Your Highness, but you seem to have some business to attend to. Please prioritize yourself, and take no worry of me," I said.

"I've just finished my business."

*Just now?*

The carriage was heading in the exact opposite direction of the castle. His business might be done, but he wasn't going home.

"I came to see you," he said. He smiled and gestured for me to board the carriage.

I wanted to decline since I didn't want to get involved in anything annoying, but it would also be annoying to have a back-and-forth with him here and end up discovered by someone in the mansion.

*What do I do?*

I wanted to run then and there but couldn't if I didn't do something about the person in front of me. I was on foot; he was in a carriage. No matter how you looked at it, I was at a disadvantage.

*And killing a prince would be a problem, wouldn't it?*

"What should I do? Should I kill him?" asked Tiegel, and I nearly gave the order to do so before I could stop myself. I wanted to tell him to. But we were dealing with a prince directly in front of my mansion. Evan wasn't alone, and other people likely knew he was coming to visit me.

*Ah, it would get really complicated to kill him here.*

With no other choice, I boarded the carriage with Tiegel.

"Well then. What business do you have with me, Your Highness? I am in somewhat of a hurry," I said.

“A hurry to run away from home?”

I didn't respond.

“You're alone other than one obedient attendant, carrying only one bag, leaving your mansion but not through the normal route... I never imagined a noblewoman would leap over a wall. It's a rather impressive show for running away. What would make you do something like that?”

“Personal reasons. I don't believe I have any obligation to report them to you.”

“No, you don't. I was just curious.”

“I appreciate your interest in my life, but it's nothing significant.”

“Really? I wondered if it might not be because my younger brother has become engaged to your younger sister...”

He might have phrased it like that, but he was certain. He was smiling, but his eyes were as sharp as a wolf who'd caught its prey. I felt pressure as if he would snap his jaws around my neck and cut off my breath if I answered one question wrong, which told me he was attempting to rattle me to get me to tell him my true intentions.

Not that I was the sort of girl who got rattled by something as minor as this. I may look like a twelve-year-old girl, but inside was a battle-hardened assassin.

“You must jest, Your Highness. Rosemary's engagement is an event to be celebrated. Should we not discuss the real reason you're here? I'm sure you're very busy,” I said.

“I suppose not.” He smiled, but I had no idea what he was thinking. I'd met this sort of person in my last life plenty of times. They were the trickiest to deal with, the kind I least wanted to become involved with. “I wanted to ask you about your sister. What sort of person is she?” he inquired.

“Is there a reason for asking me this?” I replied.

Evan didn't say anything. He waited for me to continue.

“I could easily feed you false information, perhaps to break off my sister's engagement if I happen not to like her or, conversely, to create a connection for

myself to the royal family,” I said.

“You aren’t that foolish,” he said with a smile. He seemed certain about that, too. We’d only just met at the Queen’s tea party. He knows nothing about me; how can he say that for certain?

*I don’t like this.*

“You should have methods for learning about my sister without asking me directly,” I said. “I don’t think this is what you should be asking right now.”

“This needs to be dealt with as soon as possible.”

Asking about Rosemary was just a secondary objective. His primary goal was something else. He had no reason to ask me about her because he had no guarantee the information I’d give him was correct.

Uncertain information like that is pointless.

If he wants to know what sort of person she is, he can observe her and figure it out himself. Even then, it wouldn’t be too late for him to act. He said he had business with me. Is his goal to meet *me* specifically? Does he want to know what sort of person I am? No. It’s simply the meeting.

The carriage was heading towards the castle. This was to tell everyone that the Violette family had not been pulled into the Royal Consort’s faction.

Not all the nobles had joined factions yet; some were still waiting and watching. If the Violette family and all its wealth were seen to be becoming friends with only Heinrich, then the factions would start to sway heavily in the Royal Consort’s favor. That would worsen the fighting between the factions, dividing the country in two. That was something the country had to avoid.

“Are you done thinking?” asked Evan, as if waiting for that moment. Any normal noble girl would turn weak in the knees at the sight of his sunny smile, but I found it suspicious.

“Your goal is to have as many people as possible see the two of us together,” I said. “That way, you’re telling the nobles that the Violette family has not joined the consort faction, and therefore, it is too early for them to choose sides.”

“You are clever. When I saw you at the tea party, I thought you were different



from all the other noble girls. Your eyes aren't the same as normal nobles who've lived their lives in a closed-off box, having never seen anything. They're like the eyes of a killer. That's why something about you seemed very off to me. At first, I thought you were an assassin sent by the consort's faction to kill me."

*Hm.* Evan must have interacted a lot with members of my (former) occupation to notice how similar I seemed to them. I thought I'd turned myself into the perfect noble girl, but apparently, I failed to conceal that at least.

"I am a normal noble girl," I said.

"...I guess you are naïve, in a way, if you really think that's true. Well, we'll leave it at that. I'd like you to accompany me."

"What do I get out of this arrangement?"

"A normal noble girl would want a connection to the royal family."

"Because they get something out of it. But I wouldn't. I don't want to be involved in a tedious struggle for the throne."

"Which is why you ran away from home. It's a bit extreme."

"I don't believe it is," I said. "I expressed my objections to my mother and fool of a sister. I fulfilled my duties at that point. They're free to destroy everything or build it up. I have no obligation to see that through. If things go as they are, they will destroy everything. If the choices are to become a dishonored noble or hide myself as a commoner and build up my life there, then the latter is far more logical. The former could end in punishment, depending on how the die falls."

"Let me tell you one thing: no normal noble girl can survive life as a commoner. They can't even change their clothes without help. *That* is a real noble girl. It's something you should remember if you plan to become a real noblewoman. And in terms of what's in it for you, I will pull whatever strings necessary to prevent you from receiving punishment if it does come to that. I'll also give you enough of a reward that you can live easily once it's all over. How does that sound?"

"*Actually become a noblewoman*"? He makes it sound like I'm a fake noble. I don't like it.

I may have been an assassin in my last life, but I really was just living as a noble girl in this world. Even if he looked into me, there was nothing to find... Except there was. But it wouldn't be an issue. I'm connected to Rick, who's nobility. And who would believe me if I told them I'm different from normal noble girls because I was an assassin in my past life? They would just think I was insane and send me to the psych ward.

I considered his proposal. It was true I had nowhere to go other than the Dark Guild if I ran away from home. My life would end up the same as my last one. That was fine in its own way. There was nothing wrong with it. But I was given this chance to live a different life. I sort of wanted to try it out.

There are risks in going along with him, but he has promised me a peaceful life with enough compensation to survive.

I really have no choice. I might as well give it a go.

"I'd like it in writing," I said.

"Then our negotiations are complete," said Evan, seeming very happy.

For some reason, Tiegel, sitting next to me, glared with disgust at Evan the whole time.

## Seven: There Are Only Two Ways to Deal With Enemies: Use Them, or Eliminate Them

**“YOUR** food is ready, my lady.”

“Hm?”

While it hadn't been announced, Rosemary's engagement to Heinrich was formalized, so several knights were sent to our mansion to guard her. The knights and maidservants sent by the royal court were with Rosemary at every moment of the day. She seemed to be floating on clouds, thinking she was a princess, while Amaryllis was moved by how much the court cared about Rosemary. To me, though, it didn't look like caring. It looked like surveillance.

How happy it must be being them that their heads are so full of fluff they don't even realize that.

I left the situation alone for a while, thinking it was fine so long as it didn't threaten my peace, but it seemed that wouldn't be the case.

A maidservant brought my breakfast to my room, even though I hadn't requested it. Not only that, but she stepped into my room like she owned the place, not even asking permission to enter. This must be happening because I've behaved too nicely since I injured Bruce. Humans are so annoying to deal with.

“Don't enter my room without permission,” I ordered. “And I never said I would be taking my breakfast in my room.”

“Lady Rosemary ordered me to bring your food,” said the maidservant.

“Do you serve Rosemary? Or do you serve the Violette family?”

She looked at me like the answer was obvious, but I was asking because her actions contradicted the correct answer. I don't get it.

“The Violette family, my lady,” she said.

“Then why are you acting under Rosemary’s orders?”

“I...”

It looked like she finally realized her mistake. Not that it mattered.

On top of that, I looked at the food she’d placed on the table. It was a bowl of soup, or rather, a weak broth, with one slice of stale bread.

*Is this the sort of breakfast a lady eats? Even most commoners eat better than this.*

“What is this?” I asked.

The maidservant saw where I was looking and fell into an uncomfortable silence. She shouldn’t have done this if she couldn’t answer that question.

“What’s wrong? You brought it and said it was food. Why don’t you answer? I’ll ask you one more time. What is this?”

“...Food.”

“For whom?”

“You, Lady Selena.”

“I see.”

I went to the table and picked up the bowl of soup. The maidservant sighed in relief, mistaking that action as a sign of my acceptance of the food.

There was no way I’d accept it.

“Aaaah!”

I threw the bowl of soup at her. The still-hot broth splashed across her face, and the bowl bounced off her forehead before falling to the ground.

“Marin, who put you up to this ridiculousness?” I asked.

“I, uh, ah...”

I let a small amount of my hostile aura slip and walked slowly towards her. She trembled like a newborn fawn, babbling incomprehensible words.

“Can you not answer because there was no one? Did you come up with this idea and carry it out all on your own? Because, if so...”

“Ah!”

Her legs gave out from under her from sheer terror. I gripped her bangs.  
“What punishment do you want?”

“Lady Ro... It was... Lady Rosemary ordered it...”

“I see. Then, go fetch her and my mother,” I ordered.

“A-Ah, y-yes, my lady.”

The maidservant rushed from my room like a fleeing animal.

“How ridiculous,” I murmured.

Rosemary and Amaryllis quickly arrived in my room.

“Selena, what happened, dear?” asked Amaryllis as she took in the horrible state of my room with shock.

I imagined that what the maidservant said was true and that Rosemary had really ordered her to do that. Rosemary looked at me with spite in her eyes.

“Do you know what that is on the floor?” I asked.

Amaryllis looked at the bowl and liquid. “What is it?”

“My breakfast, apparently. That maidservant brought it. I never said I would be taking breakfast in my room. She came in without permission and tried to feed me *that*.”

“Oh, dear!” Amaryllis looked at the maidservant with disbelief. The maidservant’s face was pale, and her body trembled.

“She says Rosemary ordered her to do it,” I said.

“Rosemary, did you?” asked Amaryllis, surprised but honestly trying to find the truth.

Tears immediately sprung into Rosemary’s eyes, and she pleaded, “H-How horrible, *hic*. I wouldn’t do something like that, *hic*. Waah!”

“O-Of course not. I’m sorry, dear.” Amaryllis was thrown off kilter when Rosemary started to cry. She pulled her gently into a hug, her expression filled with guilt.

*How simple can this woman be? I shudder when I think that I came from her womb.*

“Which means you’re saying the maidservant did it on her own?” I asked. “Not only did she barge into my room uninvited, she insulted me, a noble and the daughter of the house’s master. The punishment for that should be a lashing and removal from service.”

“But...” Fat tears streamed down the maidservant’s face as she looked to Rosemary for help. “Lady Rosemary, this is too much. You were the one who said you found Lady Selena offensive, that you needed to show her that you were higher in standing now that you’re engaged to royalty; you needed to put her in her place. All I did was follow your orders! You’re going to sell me out to protect yourself?”

“D-Don’t speak out of line,” countered Rosemary. “You did this all on your own. Maybe you convinced yourself it was for me. I understand accusing the person who did it, but accusing the person they did it for is just crazy.”

*And there’s Rosemary, insisting on her innocence until the very end.*

“But...” the maidservant said, crumpling into sobs.

Rosemary must have felt bad for her, though, because she said, “Lashing is too harsh, though. Selena, you’re so heartless to say such cruel things so lightly.”

Even if we blamed her, she was trying to let it run off her like water off a duck’s back, then act like the kind mistress who looked out for her servants.

Amaryllis listened to the commotion while the gathered servants looked moved by Rosemary’s kindness and instead turned cold eyes on me.

*How blessed they are with such empty heads.*

“It’s the standard punishment for someone who insults nobility,” I said. “Are you saying we should let someone who does something like that off with no punishment? It would set a bad example for the other servants not to punish her.”

“But, lashes...” said Rosemary.

“It’s the lightest punishment. It’s not like I’m sentencing her to death,” I said.

“Death...?” the maidservant repeated, shaking like a leaf and wrapping her arms around her body.

“Why are you surprised?” I asked. “It’s not uncommon to hear announcements of death sentences for damaging the dignity of nobles. And you’re not exempt from this either, Rosemary. An insult to the royal family can result in an instant death sentence.”

“But His Highness loves me.”

*Wow. She is an actual idiot.*

Yes, he had proposed to marry her, but we had no idea if Heinrich was truly infatuated with her. We didn’t know his thoughts or who was pulling the strings from behind him.

It was dangerous to assume there was no ulterior motive behind a noble engagement. Deceive and be deceived. Use and be used. Betray and be betrayed. That is nobility.

The word “noble” is simply a term for a type of con artist.

Essentially, Rosemary was saying that Heinrich would bend the law for his beloved to erase the crime she committed. Which, surprisingly, meant she was saying she could get away with anything she wanted. However, she didn’t seem to have realized that herself yet.

And luckily, everyone around her, including Amaryllis, were fools, meaning none of them realized it either.

It seemed Rosemary really did have terrible luck.

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**ROSEMARY** never admitted her mistake.

I ordered a butler to carry out the lashing. I threatened him to make sure he didn’t hold back. The punishment was carried out properly.

But I didn’t have the maidservant removed from the mansion.

She was someone Rosemary had sold out. She wasn’t likely to go along with

what Rosemary said anymore. It had been a little inconvenient having only Tiegel as my attendant, and, being a noble girl, it didn't reflect well on me to not have at least one female attendant. So, I decided to use her. I just needed to take precautions to ensure she didn't betray me.

"You have wounds all over your back, don't you?" I said. "If they scar, you may not be able to find a husband."

She paled.

Injuries of that kind wouldn't be that obvious, even if they did scar a little, and it was far from certain she would be unable to marry in the future. She'd never been injured before, though, so she probably didn't know.

"Poor thing. And you were only doing as Rosemary said," I whispered in her ear like the devil.

"Urgh."

"And you wouldn't have had to go through that if Rosemary had only told the truth."

"What?" She looked at me with surprise.

"Well, you're a maidservant. You can't very well go against your master's daughter. You had no choice. You were just following orders. If she'd told the truth, you would have simply had reduced payment for a few months. That's all. But Rosemary said you did it all on your own. She put all the blame on you."

Anger grew on her face.

"A mere commoner girl put scars on you, a woman of noble birth, even if of low noble birth. Scars that will remain your whole life," I whispered.

Humans are so simple. Hatred grew all the stronger when it was directed towards someone they believed was lower than themselves.

Oh, foolish Rosemary. If you're not careful when you use others, you'll only find yourself with more enemies.

The maidservant's name was Marin, and I kept her on as my personal lady-in-waiting.



**ROSEMARY** didn't stop her attempts at harassing me and still had servants willing to help her. They must have seen what happened to Marin when she helped Rosemary. For some reason, though, each seemed to think they alone were safe. I had no idea what evidence they had for this belief, though.

*Perhaps people lack the skills to deal with danger when living in a world of daisies and butterflies.*

"Rosemary. What is this?" I asked. I was visiting her room to check on her studies after Amaryllis insisted.

She greeted me with a smile and had me sit on the settee; then, her maid placed a teacup with some cloudy liquid in it in front of me.

"It's...tea," said Rosemary.

Behind me was Tiegel, as my attendant. His eyes glinted sharply.

"I see," I said. "Does this look like tea to you?"

It was obviously muddy water. Actually, there was that time several years ago where I made her drink muddy water, because she was talking as if she knew what it tasted like even though she didn't. Perhaps this was some sort of payback for that.

Luckily, it rained heavily yesterday, meaning there were all sorts of puddles in the gardens. She's willing to put effort into pointless things like going outside just to get muddy water. If she was willing to use her energy for that, I wish she'd just put it towards her studies. If she did, Amaryllis wouldn't have to ask me to check on Rosemary's studies, and I wouldn't have to come to her room.

It's not like I have time to waste. I'm quite busy. I have two duties: being an assassin and being a noble girl.

"Tiegel, make me a cup of tea, please," I requested.

"Yes, my lady."

I imagined the maid had used a different tea set to prepare my tea from the one she used for Rosemary's tea. Tiegel used the latter to make another cup.

“Give it to Rosemary,” I said.

“Yes, my lady.” He set it in front of her.

“Drink it,” I said.

He’d prepared the tea right in front of her, so she was obviously aware he had done nothing to it, which was why she didn’t hesitate to drink it, even though my attendant prepared it, and she considered me her enemy. I would never drink that tea.

“How is it?” I asked.

“It’s fine,” said Rosemary.

“I see. And what are you drinking?”

“Tea...”

“I see.” I pointed to the cup that was in front of me again. “Then what’s this?”

“...Tea.” Her answer didn’t change.

“I see.”

“Eeek! What the?!”

“My lady!” cried Rosemary’s maid as she tried to keep me from grabbing Rosemary’s arm and dragging her from the room, but Tiegel stopped her.

Several guards were dispatched by the royal court to protect Rosemary, in a way. The knights weren’t sure what to do since it was me, her older sister, dragging her from the room. They just followed us.

I pulled her towards the garden, looked for a muddy puddle, and threw her into it, like I did back then. It had been years since then, and she still hadn’t matured at all. I feel bad for the household’s tutors, knowing how pointless the education provided by a duke’s family has become with her.

“Eeek!” shrieked Rosemary.

“What are you doing?!” shouted one of the knights from behind as he rushed over to help her up.

Rosemary spat out the small amount of dirty water that got in her mouth and

said, “Selena, what are you doing? Do you really think you’ll get away with treating me, Prince Heinrich’s fiancée, like this? Do you understand? I’m going to marry a prince.”

“You couldn’t tell the difference between tea and muddy water,” I said. “A future princess will find things difficult if she can’t do that much. Since, as the princess, you’d be interacting with international guests for diplomacy.”

Not that I actually thought they’d be sending a former commoner like Rosemary out into the public.

“It would be quite a problem if you made a mistake and served muddy water to a guest from another country. So, I thought it would be best if you learned the difference now. Mother did ask me to check on your studies. I think now you should understand that what you served me was not tea but dirty water.”

“Lady Selena, you’re taking this too far,” said the knight who helped Rosemary up as he glared at me.

“I didn’t think she would truly understand if I just told her. She needed to experience it herself,” I said. “She needed to know what she was trying to have others drink.”

“But still, this is...”

*Is he still not satisfied? It’s not a big deal. It’s not like I killed her.*

“I didn’t serve you muddy water,” said Rosemary.

*Really? You’re going to stand there and say that when it was made right in front of you? I already guessed you would likely order a maid to clean this up, but Marin got a hold of it before that happened. That’s why I didn’t bring her with me.*

“I-I didn’t tell anyone to do it,” said Rosemary.

“You’re saying this was yet another thing a maid just went and did on her own?”

That’s its own problem. What would people think of a princess who couldn’t control her maids? People will say she’s not cut out to be royalty, which could end up with her being taken from her fiancé. Rosemary doesn’t understand that

at all, and that lack of ability to understand threats will be her undoing in court.

“Fine, then,” I said. “Which maid would you like flogged this time?”

“I-I don’t know! I have no idea about any of this. I’m engaged to Prince Heinrich. Do you really think you can treat me like this? The prince is madly in love with me! What do you think he’ll do when he hears about it?”

You’ve never even met him. I’m surprised you’d think he’s madly in love with you even though all he did was propose marriage. Maybe you still think like a commoner in that regard. Commoners marry when they fall in love with each other. But nobles marry for strategy. A proposal is not proof of love.

“Hm, I wonder,” I said. “I’m fairly certain nothing will happen.”

“There’s no... It can’t... That’s not true!”

Her complexion soured. She must have an idea of what I meant.

The knights guarding her looked away from her. Her engagement to the prince was made with input from all sorts of people. The word “engagement” hid the fact it was a contract. It was the same as the prince having no feelings involved.

Heinrich did not love Rosemary. He probably wasn’t even interested in her. Proof of that was that he’d never visited our mansion.

Rosemary knew, she really did. She just pretended she didn’t.

“Rosemary, stop clinging to uncertain things,” I said. “You’ll only destroy yourself. Tiegel, let’s go.”

Rosemary didn’t respond. Tiegel and I went back inside the mansion.

News of the event spread like wildfire through the servants, and they looked at me with even more disdain. Not that I cared. Every time I left my room, I was met with harsh glares from the servants. Some even whispered behind my back.

When I was an assassin, I’d snuck into mansions and pretended to be a servant several times. Based on that experience, I could tell the servants here lacked discipline. Well, perhaps it was only to be expected, considering the all-too-soft Amaryllis was in charge of them.

I gained a negative reputation in the social sphere after that event. Apparently, I was a horribly mean girl who used her status to torture the weak, or I was an arrogant and selfish noble girl. I had no intention of arguing with them.

“Why don’t you say anything, my lady?” asked Tiegel one day, looking at me angrily. He seemed somehow unhappy about the hostility towards me and rumors about me.

“There’s no point,” I said. “If no one will believe me, then it’s irrelevant if what I say is the truth or not. And, the more said on the matter, the more the truth is buried and twisted.”

Humans believe what they want to believe. Truth has no value. I have neither the time nor energy to devote to something without value. There would be nothing more pointless.

## Eight: The Fool Continues Down the Path to Destruction

**“WHAT** business do you have with me?”

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw idiots whispering amongst themselves. This sight had become almost a guaranteed thing, and that made me sigh.

I had decided to go on a walk around town to relax. When I left my room, a man in knight's clothing blocked my way.

*This is one of Rosemary's guards, isn't it?*

I shot Tiegel a look, who was behind me, to tell him not to do anything.

“Lady Rosemary is engaged to royalty,” said the knight. Not only his tone but his attitude was incredibly insolent. “It doesn't matter that you're her sister. If you insult her, you will lose your head.” He leaned over, bringing his face close to mine.

*Is he trying to threaten me? How funny.*

“You'll lose your head before that happens,” I said.

“What was that?”

*Oh, how moronic this man is.*

This was a peaceful place. If we were on the battlefield, I'd kill him instantly.

“Do you think you'll get away with treating your master's daughter with that attitude?” I said, and the knight burst into laughter.

Normally, the servants nearby should have reprimanded the guard for his behavior, but no one did. They probably thought it was fine because it was me. And that they had no obligation to help me because I'm the horrible person who terrorizes Rosemary. To them, it was probably perfectly expected for one of Rosemary's guards to take an arrogant attitude with me.

Does this man think he's a champion of justice? There's no kind I hate more than that. They think anything is acceptable if it's for justice. And they believe

defending the weak is just.

But can you just eliminate the possibility that the weak may also be the evil? And how can they even say for certainty that justice is noble?

People think anything is legal if it's done in the name of justice. That's why they turn their eyes from the tragedies they instigate, calling the lives they crush beneath their heel "noble sacrifices." They don't even know if those "noble sacrifices" agreed to be sacrificed.

Whenever I'm faced with this type of person, I think how foolish and worthless they are.

"Nothing will happen to me," said the guard. "Because I'm Lady Rosemary's guard, and she's engaged to Prince Heinrich, royalty."

"I see. Which means you're hoping Prince Heinrich will become a pawn doing whatever you, a guard for his fiancée, want him to do?"

"How dare you mock the prince!" he roared, spittle flying.

It was my turn to laugh. "What are you saying? You said it first. That you and Rosemary have Prince Heinrich at your backs. That if I show any hostility, Prince Heinrich will punish me. Doesn't that mean exactly what I said?"

"Argh."

The guard swung at me, trying to take attention off his misstep. His strike easily sent me flying, and I crashed into the wall.

"Eeek!" I heard a quiet shriek from the servants watching the show, even though they pretended not to care.

Tiegel's eyes were wide, fixed on me, but he didn't move. I had ordered him not to. Indeed, if I hadn't ordered him not to, he likely would have cut the foolish knight down the moment he raised his fist.

It probably wasn't a good idea to injure a knight dispatched by the royal court. Even if he did something wrong. I had no proof of the knight's actions, and the servants witnessing the event were incredibly unlikely to give testimony to my advantage.

I shouldn't have given Tiegel the order to start with.

As I soared through the air, I thought, *What a powerless body this is.*

I was younger than I had been before dying in my previous world. Even with all my training, my slender limbs were like decorations, not useful for anything.

“You won’t get off easily if you mock me any further,” said the knight.

How dare a mere knight raise his fist against the daughter of a duke. What is happening to people’s understanding of status in this country? If you were in my previous world, you wouldn’t even be able to complain if you were given the death sentence on the spot.

“You’re the one who won’t get off easily,” I said.

“Huh?”

*What a thug.*

The knight threatened me, and the servants watching ran out of fear of being dragged into this as if to say they had nothing to do with it.

There’s not a single decent person here.

All right. How much can this man take?

I unleashed a hostile aura towards him. He flinched, of course. I adjusted the strength.

“Ack!”

His face paled, and he collapsed to the ground. How comical he looked, trembling like that. I drew the sword hanging from his hip.

*...It’s heavy.*

Well, as an assassin, I generally used knives and daggers. Can’t very well expect me to be able to use a sword, can you?

I swung the blade down towards the man. It whistled past him and pierced into the floor. Tears streamed from his eyes as he looked at the sword embedded in the ground. He probably thought I was going to kill him.

“I was certain you must have had a toy hanging from your hip since you couldn’t even handle this much hostile aura, but it does seem to be the real thing,” I said. “How interesting, though, to always keep something you can’t



handle with you. Does wearing this make you bark at people, regardless of who they are or whether you know how strong they are? I suggest you learn your place. If you don't, I promise I'll stop your breath next time. Do you understand?"

I strengthened my aura a little, and the man's head jerked up and down like a broken puppet. I pulled the sword out and walked away from him because I noticed someone approaching.

"What the hell are you doing sitting in a place like this?" The person who came was another man wearing the same knight's uniform as the first one, meaning he must be another one of Rosemary's guards from the court.

"Are you another of Rosemary's guards sent by Prince Heinrich?" I asked.

"Yes, my lady," he replied with appropriate manners. He seemed a far more proper knight than the man trembling on the ground.

"He attacked me, Duke Violette's daughter," I said. "And just because he heard rumors that I was terrorizing Rosemary." I made myself tremble and wrapped my arms around myself.

I was still a twelve-year-old child and a noble's daughter at that. I normally would never have even seen blood. It was best if I acted scared.

The knight who came to check on the commotion looked at the sword lying on the ground. I didn't say anything. He likely assumed the other knight had drawn his sword and pointed it at a twelve-year-old girl.

"How dare you," he said.

"N-No, sir, I didn't..." said the trembling knight.

*Huh. So, the new knight is a higher rank.*

"No? Then why is your sword drawn despite there being no reason to draw it? Did you threaten this young lady with it?"

The trembling knight didn't say anything. He couldn't. He couldn't tell a higher-ranking knight that he was the one who'd been threatened. I couldn't blame him. How could he ever say something so pathetic? It wasn't like he would believe him anyway.

Who would believe that? A full-grown adult knight threatened by a twelve-year-old? And not just any twelve-year-old, the sort of sheltered daughter of a noble who's never seen combat. He could never say that.

"Lady Selena, you have my apologies," said the second knight. "Are you injured? I will report this to our superior, and he'll face severe punishment."

"He punched me, but I'm not seriously injured," I said. "And I have no complaints as long as he faces appropriate punishment. You are knights assigned to protect Rosemary, Prince Heinrich's fiancée. You must always remember that your actions reflect on His Highness. If you don't, you may damage his reputation."

"You are absolutely right, my lady."

How stupid. Even if I'm in a different world, some things never change. One of those is that people who don't understand their place have no future.

The knight who attacked me paled, his body trembling at the thought of the future about to befall him. I felt much better when I imagined what would happen to him.

"Lady Selena, may I treat your wound?" Tiegel asked.

"Of course," I said, and the two of us turned away and returned to my room. Tiegel brought the emergency medical kit over and tended to me. He looked angry for some reason.

He was silent as he did. He didn't say anything until he'd finished. "You can tell I'm angry, can't you?" he said.

"Yes."

"But you don't understand why."

"No."

He let out a heavy sigh, but he didn't say anything, and his expression looked like Amaryllis's when she was thinking how she had to explain something to a child who didn't understand.

Eventually, he said, "I don't want you to get hurt."

“Why? It’s not like it hurts you. I don’t see the problem. If you were my guard, you might bear some responsibility if I was injured, but you were an attendant, and he was a knight. You couldn’t help it that you couldn’t do anything. There’s nothing you have to be bothered about. I’m satisfied with how things went. I was able to eliminate an annoying insect with just some minor injuries.”

And he *was* annoying. Everything about him was annoying. His attitude implied he believed he was above me, and his actions said he thought he was in the right and would, therefore, get away with anything.

It wasn’t just today, either. He insulted me several times in a way that I would never expect from a mere knight.

Tiegel grimaced. He almost looked like he was about to cry. “That’s not it,” he said. “That’s not the problem, not at all. I don’t like it when you’re hurt, but it has nothing to do with my position or that you’re a noble. It’s because you’re important to me. I don’t want you to be hurt.”

I didn’t say anything.

*Important? What does he mean by important to him? I don’t get what he’s saying.*

The most important thing to humans is themselves. They always put themselves over everything else. It doesn’t matter what happens to anything but them, right?

*“I will go down with you, if need be, to protect him.”*

I remembered the knight who killed me in my last life. That knight hadn’t run. The man he was protecting just fled, abandoning him, but the knight fought on to the bitter end. He never tried to escape.

It wasn’t like the knight knew he would win. Actually, he seemed certain he wouldn’t. Why didn’t he run when he knew he would die and knew he wasn’t the one being targeted? Why did he risk his life for someone else? What made him able to?

“I simply do my best for myself,” I said.

“...I understand,” said Tiegel with an expression I couldn’t describe, but he

didn't say anything else. He must have thought it wouldn't get through to me even if he did say it.

And he was right. I didn't get it. I was relieved he didn't say anything else on the matter.

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### **Side View: John Marcell**

**"I'M** horrified one of our knights was foolish enough to point their sword at a noble lady. And a twelve-year-old at that."

Today, one of my junior knights attacked Lady Selena Violette. The poor girl was trembling. I reported the incident to the captain of the knights.

But then I remembered something.

*"You are knights assigned to protect Rosemary, Prince Heinrich's fiancée. You must always remember that your actions reflect on His Highness. If you don't, you may damage his reputation,"* she'd said with dignity.

Was that really a twelve-year-old girl? I sensed a faint darkness in those eyes.

And why was the knight so scared? Was he afraid of the punishment he'd faced because I caught him? No, he was frightened even before that.

Was he afraid of Selena Violette? He, a fully-fledged knight?

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing, sir."

It couldn't be. It's my misinterpretation. She's just a twelve-year-old girl, after all. And the daughter of a duke. While it might not sound good to put it this way, a noble girl's every move is closely controlled in order for them to marry into a better family than their own.

They are treated and raised carefully so they don't suffer a scratch. They live in a world far removed from violence. That's even more true when it's a duke's family. While a noble girl may fear a knight's violence, there was no way a knight should fear a noble girl.

"Captain, what will his punishment be?"

“You have to ask? He turned his weapon on a child. Her status is irrelevant. He lacks the proper conscientiousness for wielding a weapon that can take lives. Michel d’Elio will be removed from duty.”

“Is that appropriate? Prince Heinrich may disapprove. He—”

“John, I’m the one with authority over the knights, not His Highness. Only His Majesty the King would have a say if not me, and even His Majesty would be overstepping his authority if he said anything. In their case, it can be interpreted as a rebellion against the throne if a royal oversteps their bounds if not done carefully. That’s how much power the royals wield. Even the children.”

*Even the children...?*

Selena Violette may be a child, but inside, she’s really... No, I’m overthinking it.

“Tell Michel to gather his things immediately. If he argues, tell him it’s either this or imprisonment.”

“Yes, sir.”

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### **Side View: Michel d’Elio**

**“WHAT?** Discharged? *Me?*”

“What did you expect? You turned your sword on a noble’s daughter.”

“What an idiot. Can’t believe after all that kissing up you did, you finally settled into Prince Heinrich’s good graces and then blew it on something this stupid.”

“Hey, at least you don’t have to worry about what’ll happen after you’re gone. We’ll pick up the slack and protect His Highness.”

“Yeah, so why don’t you tuck your tail between your legs like a good little puppy and run off.”

“Urk.”

The other knights who started as Prince Heinrich’s guards around the same time as me took pleasure in watching me lose the status I’d finally obtained.

They mocked me as they watched me fall.

There wasn't a single person there I could trust. I stepped on them to climb higher, and they stepped on me. That's how you got anywhere. How you got a more stable future for yourself.

"Hey, asshole, here's your bag."

"See ya. Not that we'll actually ever see you again. Have a good life."

They threw me out of the duke's mansion along with my bag, which they packed for me.

I didn't even do anything wrong.

Selena Violette is the real monster. There's no way that *thing* is the daughter of a duke. I'd heard all sorts of rumors about her, but they weren't true. The truth is far worse. The rumors are cute in comparison.

I don't doubt Selena Violette is subjecting Lady Rosemary to horrific treatment. Even worse than the rumors say.

"Remember me, Selena Violette," I said to myself, walking down the street because they didn't even lend me a carriage.

"There's no way she'll remember you. You're not worth remembering."

"Who's there?!" I shouted. I hadn't realized my surroundings had turned dark and no one was around. Except one person standing in the gloom of the night street. I had a feeling I recognized them, but I couldn't be certain since it was so dark.

"Lady Selena told me to leave you alone, but I can't forgive you for hurting her," murmured the figure. "Though she doesn't understand that since she's so unconcerned about herself. Well. I won't hope for her understanding since I decided to do this myself."

This guy is giving me the creeps, muttering to himself.

"I don't know who you are," I said, "but you picked the wrong person to mess with. I'm a knight assigned to protect Prince Heinrich, and you're just some measly thug."

“I don’t think that matters. You were dismissed, after all.”

“How the hell do you know— Agh!”

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“**WHAT** is it?”

“A murder.”

“A man’s mutilated corpse was found in an alley.”

“His face was all messed up, and his clothes and everything were taken off, too. No way of telling who he was.”

“His clothes were taken off? A robbery?”

“Who knows? But they said his face was completely smashed. Sounds like a grudge killing to me. Either way, there’s been a lot of scary talk since morning.”

Rick passed by the chattering commoners and murmured, “Scary indeed. That’s what happens when you touch things that belong to others,” though his expression showed no fear.

“What is it, Rick?”

“Nothing, Sia. Have you finished shopping?”

“Yes.”

“Then let’s go home. Looks like something nasty happened.”

“It does.”

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“**TIEGEL**, what happened?”

“What do you mean?”

“You seem to be in an incredibly good mood. I thought something might have happened.”

He’d been in a terrible mood since that knight hit me, but now he looked so happy he might start whistling.

“Ah, it’s just that someone I don’t like got their just deserts last night. I feel

like a weight has been taken off me.”

“I see. Well, don’t go too overboard.”

“Yes, my lady.”

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“**SELENA**, you’re so horrible!”

Apparently, the knight who hit me was relieved of duty. When Rosemary heard, she ran to me in tears. That was the sort of thing that made me think she was scheming. She always did what she did when others were watching. But she was a fool because she didn’t understand what it meant to have people’s eyes on you. If people were watching, you couldn’t hide anything if the event turned into a huge mess and went public. She should be more cautious. That wasn’t something you could be careless with.

“Why am I horrible?” I asked.

“I don’t care how jealous you are that the prince ignored you and chose me as his fiancée; it’s way too horrible to have one of my guards fired!”

She doesn’t learn. She doesn’t want to learn. She’s just a fool who found herself in power. This sort of thing is far too dangerous. I’ll keep my eye out for the best time to get out of here before I get dragged into this.

“Are you an idiot?” I said. “Or are you mocking Prince Heinrich? There’s no way a measly little girl like myself could get a guard relieved of duty when he had been sent directly by the prince. I can’t remove a knight from his position; I can’t even give him orders. Did you not know that? And you’re engaged to the prince? How unfortunate.”

“W-Well, I used to be a commoner. I’m not like you. Y-You’re horrible for always making fun of me for being a commoner.”

That excuse could only get her so far. In all honesty, Heinrich is a fool. I don’t care if she’d be easy to control; Rosemary is nothing but poison. How could he choose her? It was a bad move. I wish Heinrich’s side would get their hands on the reins properly.

If he’d thought it through, he would’ve waited and observed her for a bit



more. He never would've picked a girl with no common sense for his bride since she might end up in a position where she's in charge of interacting with foreign dignitaries. There'd be no avoiding an international incident if people had to deal with that girl and her lack of common sense.

"Someone engaged to a prince can't get away with the excuse 'I used to be a commoner,' and if you think that, you might as well just step down now," I said. "You and I are different, I'll give you that. That's why you have to work harder than me or any other noble girl."

"I-I am working harder."

I was already aware that effort wasn't for learning; it was for running away from the household tutors. "Then you're not trying hard enough," I said.

"W-Waaah, you're so mean! Why do you bully me so much?"

"Oh, poor Lady Rosemary," said a nearby maid, trying to calm her while glaring at me.

It wasn't just the nobles who thought they could get their share of the sweet nectar by currying up to Rosemary now that she was engaged to a prince. The servants did it, too. This maid was one of them. Not that Rosemary had the ability to see that. That lot will prey on her unless she changes. Until that sweet nectar sours, of course.

"Lady Selena, why can't you be kind to Lady Rosemary? You take this treatment of her too far," said the maid, glaring at me as she wrapped her arms around Rosemary as if to protect her.

Rosemary had no future if she saw warnings as torture and flattery as kindness. And I had no obligation to bother taking care of her.

I looked coldly down at them, turned on my heel, and returned to my room.

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### **Side View: Rosemary**

**MY** name is Rosemary. My mom died not too long ago. I had no idea what I was going to do, but then I got super lucky, and this duke's family took me in.

But seriously, that's not all. I'm a noble now! A duke's daughter! Are you

kidding me right now?! My luck is scary good.

There's another girl in the family about the same age as me, but she's super stuck up. I don't like her. I mean, she is pretty, but I bet she spends all sorts of money on her looks. Of course she'd be pretty.

I'm a commoner, so I couldn't focus that much on my looks, but the boys always said I was cute anyway. You know what that means? If I'd had money to spend on my looks, I'd be just as cute as her.

And you know what? Pretty, rich girls are always horrible people. I read this book recently. It was about this beautiful older sister who just terrorized her younger stepsister. The stepsister's mom was from a really poor family. That's, like, me!

My adopted sister, Selena, has a personality as nasty as the sister in that book; I'm sure of it. My new mom and the servants don't like her either, which proves I'm right.

How nasty a person do you have to be for your own mom not to like you? I actually feel kind of bad for her. I thought I'd try being nice to her, but she just looks down on me. I don't feel like she's trying to get closer to me at all. Not one bit.

So, not only is she mean, but she's also stupid. It'd be better for her to get along with me. I decided to show her that she should if she wanted to.

That's why I started making her out to be the bad guy, and overall, it's going *great*. I mean, she is seriously dumb. I don't care how much she hates me; she should at least see how people are looking at her and try to fix her reputation. Then, people wouldn't call her mean or evil.

I gave her some advice since she clearly couldn't help herself.

"Selena! Selena, I know you don't like me, but I want to be friends with you," I said, tears in my eyes. The servants around us had tears in their eyes, too.

I mean, see? If she just agreed here, then everyone would think better of her.

That's what I thought while I looked at her, but this is how she reacted: "Hmph."

Blank. That's what her eyes were like. They showed absolutely nothing.

"I don't dislike you," she said. "Love and hate are the same: both are emotions that can only exist if the other person is of some interest."

So, basically, she's saying she doesn't care one way or another about me? Why not? Because I'm a commoner?

No matter what I do, Selena's attitude never changes. When I got engaged to a prince, everyone else treasured me even more. Selena was the only one who didn't change, and that seriously burns my biscuits.

*"I'm engaged to Prince Heinrich. Do you really think you can treat me like this? The prince is madly in love with me! What do you think he'll do when he hears about it?"*

*"Hm, I wonder. I'm fairly certain nothing will happen."*

That's what she said to me when I tried to tell her I had Prince Heinrich supporting me since she didn't change her attitude towards me. I barely managed to tell her she was wrong, but honestly, deep down, I knew she was right.

When we got engaged, Prince Heinrich didn't actually come. He sent a messenger. The messenger said Prince Heinrich wanted me. I was so happy I jumped up and down. I mean, come on, marrying a prince? It's already crazy that a commoner like me became a noble, and now I'm marrying a prince? It's like a dream.

I thought there'd be this prince on a white horse in love with me, and we'd live happily ever after in a castle, just like in the stories. But he's never visited me, not once.

He's probably busy. I saw him at the tea party, so I know he's good-looking. I should be happy I'm marrying someone like that. I will be. Of course I will.

"I'll write him a letter."

I've written him so many letters. I keep telling him, "I want to meet you," and, "I love you." But he never replies.

Does he actually want me?

I just feel really uneasy, like I have no idea what to do. So, I pick up my pen again and try to shake off those feelings.

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### Side View: Heinrich

**“MOTHER,** why must I marry a *common* girl?! I’m royalty.”

I’ve been raging lately, and the reason is obvious. It’s because of my fiancée. In terms of status, she is from a duke’s family and that is not an issue. However, she is neither truly a member of the duke’s family nor is the family a normal duke’s family. The duke himself seems more like a seedy merchant traveling around abroad on business.

And he doesn’t care in the slightest that it’s improper for nobles to actually work.

People hesitate to say this to their faces since he is a duke, but every time they see someone connected to the Violette family, they secretly think, “What a disgrace to the aristocracy.”

“Doesn’t the Violette family have a daughter with proper noble blood?” I asked.

Selena Violette. She would have been fine. She is a beauty even amongst noble girls, and her physical attributes are developing well. She still looks childlike in some aspects, but once grown, she’ll surely be a woman who wouldn’t pale in comparison to me. And yet...

“Calm yourself, Heinrich. I’m not saying you must have a child with that filthy girl. You can have children with whatever girl takes your fancy. And I don’t honestly want you to be with that dirty commoner.” Mother sat next to me and stroked the back of my hand, calming me. “What I want is Duke Violette’s fortune.”

“If that’s the case...” Then, I should have been able to marry Selena instead.

“Selena Violette is a pariah among her own family. And despite that filthy girl’s lowly birth, she is better at endearing herself with others. Apparently, Amaryllis cares more for that filthy rag than her own daughter.”

Does that mean Selena is being tormented by that filthy girl? The nerve! It seems it's not just that girl's birth, but even her character is rotten.

"And, while this is simply a woman's intuition, I believe Selena Violette is too clever. When using someone, they should be a little on the dumb side," murmured Mother, though I didn't quite catch what she said. My head was too filled with thoughts of Selena.

"A letter for you, Your Highness." As my mother left, a servant came in and held out a letter. I groaned. I've been receiving letters from that filthy commoner nearly every day since we were betrothed.

"Rosemary Violette, for the love of... Using this despite being a fake?"

How insolent could she be, using the duke's crest on her letters as if she owned it? I tore up the letter and threw it away.

I've never read the contents of her letters. I doubt they say anything worth my time. Reading them would be a waste.

I picked up my pen to write a letter.

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"A letter for you, Lady Selena."

I looked at the letter Marin brought me and groaned. I'd been receiving letters from Heinrich lately.

They said things like, "Please rely on me if you ever find yourself in trouble," or, "I worry about you," and, "No matter what happens, I will always support you."

It was gross, though, so no point in replying.

"Should just kill him," muttered Tiegel, looking at the letter with disgust.

I would if I could, but it's hard to sneak into the royal palace, and the risks were high. I can't kill him. So, I ignored what Tiegel said, tore up the letter, and got rid of the remnants so I could pretend it never arrived and I never saw it.

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**ART** returned once after Rosemary's engagement to Heinrich.

“Why did you move ahead with the engagement without consulting with me, the head of the household?!”

He was angry that they got engaged without input. Amaryllis was shocked, seemingly unable to understand why he was angry since she never imagined he would be.

Art looked at her and sighed.

“Why are you angry?” she asked. “I thought we couldn’t ask for a better connection for Rosemary.”

“It’s not a wise decision considering the Royal Consort’s and the Prince’s personalities, as well as the situation in the court.”

“Well, I’m a woman; I don’t know anything about politics.”

BAM!

Art slammed his fist on the table.

The loud sound surprised Amaryllis, but she looked even more surprised that Art was angrier than she’d ever seen him.

“If you don’t know anything about it, then why did you make this decision without me? We wrote how many letters back and forth to each other? But you never once mentioned this.”

“I thought it was fine.”

“Higher social standing does not automatically mean more happiness. There are countless unhappy marriages. You should know this; you’re a noblewoman. Your daughter Selena is more aware of the dangers than you. Doesn’t that embarrass you? Rosemary’s marriage, in particular, should have been approached with care. Many nobles would take notice of her birth.”

On the surface, whoever marries her may pretend to value her status as part of Duke Violette’s family and care for her, but really, they would keep her hidden. Not even the servants respect her, the former commoner, for now having higher status than them.

The servants of her new family might secretly terrorize her, and some nobles would even demand payment since they were taking a commoner girl. That’s

why her marriage needed to be approached with even more care than mine. Status was a less important factor in Rosemary's marriage than personality.

Both Heinrich and his mother had horrible personalities. Neither could even come close to passing a test on being good people, meaning Rosemary was doomed to unhappiness.

The worst-case scenario could end with the destruction of the entire Violette family. But the engagement was already formalized. We couldn't break it off for our own benefit, especially not when it was with royalty.

Art specifically told Rosemary to put an appropriate distance between her and Heinrich and then told both her and me to increase our connections with the faction supporting the crown prince. Then he left to go abroad for work again.

## Nine: Arrogant Kindness and a Twisted Smile

**“WELCOME,** Prince Heinrich, Prince Evan.”

I continued to ignore Heinrich’s letters but sent a short letter to Evan letting him know about Heinrich’s letters. The result was, for some reason, the two of them coming to visit the Violette mansion.

*I sense an annoying incident coming.*

“Selena, Rosemary, please show the princes to the drawing room,” said Amaryllis.

“Yes, Mother,” I said.

“Sure,” said Rosemary.

I did think it would be good for Heinrich to visit the Violette mansion more frequently since he was engaged to Rosemary, but he’d never come before now. They’d become engaged six months ago, and this was his first time here. Perhaps that was why Rosemary was nearly bouncing up and down. She even clung to his arm without asking permission. I frowned seeing that.

“Your sister is energetic,” said Evan, amused as he watched the battle play out as Rosemary clung to Heinrich’s arm. He looked none too pleased with that.

“Why are you here?” I asked.

“It’s obvious, isn’t it?” Evan responded.

“...To keep him in check?” I supplied.

Evan’s smile deepened at that. “I just happened to hear Heinrich was coming for a visit, and I made him let me come along.”

“Just happened” to indeed. I’m sure there was no coincidence involved. This is Evan we’re talking about. He would have surveillance on Heinrich. After receiving that information, he would have made Heinrich bring him along, even though Heinrich didn’t want to. Evan would want to keep everyone else from



getting the impression that Heinrich had a close relationship with the Violettes.

And I'm getting the impression I'll get dragged into something tedious. I don't care who becomes king or dies, as long as they do it somewhere far away from me. Just kill each other off; I don't care.

"By the way, what did you do with the letters Heinrich has been sending you?" asked Evan.

"I got rid of them, obviously. If I don't have them, it's the same as if they never arrived," I said.

"I think that's a bit heavy-handed. If you insist they never arrived, they may get rid of the messenger who delivered them."

"That has nothing to do with me. It's simply their bad luck. It is unfortunate for them, having to sacrifice their life because they got wrapped up in something as ridiculous as this."

"That's a little harsh, don't you think?" Evan shot me a reproving look. That would be enough to strike fear into some people, to make them rethink things, but not me. Someone else's death wasn't going to tug at my heartstrings at this point.

"If you want to help them, you could, Your Highness," I said. "All I do is do what's best for me. I prioritize protecting myself."

"...Is that the reason why you're with Rick?"

How does he know I have any connection to Rick? I haven't told Evan anything about the Dark Guild. Did Rick say something? No, that seems unlikely. It wouldn't look good to outsiders if people found out a member of the royal family was the head of a dark guild. Even more so if they learned that was just a façade for him to exterminate the country's vermin that can't be taken care of publicly.

I should limit the number of people who know as much as possible to reduce the risk of my secret leaking.

"Are you wondering how I know?" asked Evan. "The answer's simple. I have people, too. And you are just so peculiar I decided to have you investigated."

“Peculiar?”

“Yes, peculiar. Far too peculiar for the daughter of a duke. I thought you may have killed the real Selena Violette and taken her place. But, if you had, I imagine you would do a better job blending in. Your normal behavior is just asking for people to question you.”

I didn’t respond.

Assassins never pretended to be nobility. Even if they did, they’d never stay undercover for this long. This isn’t a result of me being a third-rate assassin or anything.

Assassins don’t need to be able to act in the first place.

“You two, how long are you going to whisper to each other over there?” Heinrich interrupted from a few steps ahead, looking upset for some reason as he locked his eyes on Evan.

I never thought the two of them were on good terms, but he should at least pretend they are when they’re in someone else’s home.

“Lady Selena, I’ve wanted to see you for a long time. You received my letters, didn’t you? I was worried since you never replied,” said Heinrich.

“Letters...?” repeated Rosemary, staring daggers at me. That alone made me want to sigh, but I stopped myself with the perseverance of a lady, which I’d developed throughout this life so far.

“I’m not sure what letters you’re referring to, Your Highness,” I said. I played dumb because I didn’t want this to get even more tedious than it already was.

I guess you could call it confidence, what Heinrich is doing, trying to pick up your fiancée’s sister, of all things, right in front of her. Does he not understand what he’s saying?

“Did they not arrive?” Heinrich asked. He looked at me questioningly, then glared at Rosemary as if he’d realized something. Rosemary was putting so much effort into trying to intimidate me that she didn’t notice this look.

“Heinrich, you’re engaged to Lady Rosemary,” Evan reminded him. “I don’t see any need for you to send letters to Lady Selena.” He stepped casually in

front of me to hide me from Heinrich.

“Lady Selena is the older sister of my betrothed, Lady Rosemary. It makes perfect sense to send her letters to foster a friendly relationship. I have no other intentions,” said Heinrich.

Not a single person here thinks “friendly relationship” means literally just that. Especially when the person saying it is Heinrich, someone famous for his questionable behavior.

I could kill him if only he weren’t a prince.

“I agree it’s important to build a good relationship with your fiancée’s family, but you should prioritize building a trusting relationship with Lady Rosemary, not Lady Selena,” said Evan. “After all, it’s been six months since the engagement was agreed upon, and this is your first time visiting her.”

“I’ve been busy.” Heinrich looked away like he was uncomfortable.

I’d heard all sorts of rumors about him, which weren’t very good. Based on those, he had indeed been busy. Busy fooling around.

“I’m not trying to criticize you,” said Evan, “but writing several letters to another woman when you haven’t yet built a trusting relationship with your betrothed may cause misconceptions, even if that other woman is related to your fiancée. It may even cause complications within your relationship or damage Lady Selena’s good name.”

“I would never let that happen.”

“That’s right. We have the authority to make sure that doesn’t happen. That’s why we must be more cautious with our actions than even the nobles. Which, of course, is true of Lady Rosemary as well.”

All emotions slipped from Evan’s face, a look made all the more frightful by his attractive features. Rosemary looked flabbergasted as if she never imagined he would turn such an attack on her.

“It would be better if you didn’t make assumptions and tell your friends too much,” he said.

“What do you mean?” asked Rosemary.

“Your friends don’t listen to you because they take everything you say at face value. They listen because they think it’s funny, that’s all.”

Since she became engaged to Heinrich, Rosemary had attended tea parties thrown by all sorts of noble ladies. There, she told anyone and everyone how unjust her treatment was at the Violette residence, then she did what she could to make those stories spread.

However, the stories hadn’t spread as far as Rosemary thought. Which wasn’t surprising. She may be the adopted daughter of the Violettes, but she was still a former commoner with not a single drop of noble blood. Even if she was engaged to a prince, there was too high a risk in simply accepting her stories as true and spreading them elsewhere.

Rosemary was indeed engaged to a prince. If it had been Evan she was engaged to, others might have higher expectations of her, but her fiancé was Heinrich. Not only did he have a reputation for poor behavior, he was the son of a consort. His claim to the throne was tenuous, and no one would be surprised if the King gave up on him. If that happened, any families involved with him might be dragged into whatever mess was caused. I didn’t expect anyone to want to become closer to the fiancée of someone like that or help distribute dangerous rumors from her.

Despite her efforts, the social sphere was filled with rumors that Rosemary, in fact, looked down on *me*. I’d started them. It was easy to, as they were true. Several people had told me Rosemary was trying to damage my reputation, while other noble girls showed each other letters from Rosemary that contained that sort of content.

How dumb can she be? If she wants to spread rumors, she should be more careful about it. Putting it in writing was like saying, “Hey, please hold onto this evidence!”

“How horrible, Prince Evan,” said Rosemary. “You make it sound like I don’t have any friends.” Tears sprung to her eyes as she looked at him. I knew they were fake tears, but men backed down the moment a girl started crying. They couldn’t risk the negative reputation of being a gentleman who made a girl cry.

Thinking that, I glanced at Evan, but his smile was so terrifying I almost wished

I hadn't looked.

"It's simply advice that you should carefully choose what friends you keep close," he said. "Now, we've come all this way. Let's not stand here talking. Shall we move to the drawing room? The tea will be cold by the time we get there."

"Of course, Your Highness," I said, starting to walk again, swallowing back my urge to say, "*Just leave already.*"

Rosemary seemed to realize her fake tears wouldn't work on Evan and looked away from him in annoyance. That in and of itself was a breach of etiquette, but Evan didn't seem inclined to point that out.

Heinrich shot me a worried look, but I ignored it.

Our teatime after that started on an uncomfortable note and continued in the same manner until the end. Rosemary spent the entire time fawning over Heinrich, trying to draw his attention, but Heinrich talked endlessly to me, for some reason, with Evan bringing up even more topics than Heinrich in what seemed like an attempt not to lose.

I was fed up with this troublesome teatime and prayed for the day to end quickly. But my prayers were in vain because this teatime visit was the catalyst for several others like it in the future.

On top of that, Heinrich's letters kept coming. That ended up with strange rumors spreading in the social scene that we two sisters were fighting over Heinrich, which brought all sorts of its own troubles with it. I had a hard time putting out that particular fire, and Rick had a good laugh at my expense.

## Ten: Contradictory Beings

I turned sixteen. By now, I had become somewhat accustomed to this peaceful environment. Though, a typical noble lady would consider this far from peaceful.

I was attending an academy for only nobility and royalty. That was interesting since I'd never gone to school in my previous world. If possible, I wanted to spend the time quietly without drawing anyone's attention.

Once I started living as Selena Violette, I realized that I disliked having other people's attention because I had memories of life as an assassin. But I'd also learned during these sixteen years that that was difficult to avoid.

There were three reasons for that. First, I was a member of House Violette. We may not have strong social standing, but we were involved in various industries, which gave us significant wealth. A lot of bees gathered to sip that sweet nectar.

Second, Rosemary existed—former commoner, adopted daughter of the Violettes, and my sister. She was engaged to the second prince, known for his problematic conduct, and her demeanor was also problematic.

Just as I had become used to the peaceful environment, Rosemary had become used to her new life of luxury and status as the fiancée to a prince, and not in a good way. She had developed into a splendid, arrogant noble who looked down on others.

Despite being a former commoner, she had the second prince and the Royal Consort at her back. She was also a member of the Violette family, meaning the young noble men and ladies had no choice but to laugh off her arrogant behavior, even if they were disgusted by it.

Being the elder sister of such an idiot meant attention also turned to me. Several negative rumors about me were also out in the wild, likely started by Rosemary and those around her. I had no recollections of any of the rumored

events, but my reputation as a particularly evil lady spread far and wide thanks to help from nobles who thought a fool of a king and his queen would be easier to manipulate once on the throne than the alternative.

There used to be those who believed Rosemary had no future, as she was a commoner engaged to a prince with bad behavior, but even they had a change of heart after watching the situation and started to curry her favor. It doesn't matter how many people like them join, however. All they'll ever have is numbers.

And the third reason why I couldn't avoid attention...

"Ah, Selena. You're as beautiful as ever today."

*Him.* It was because of him. Evan Astrutte, crown prince of the Kingdom of Astra. I've had to remain close to him to signal to everyone else that the Violettes haven't aligned themselves with the faction behind Prince Heinrich.

Evan was officially recognized as the crown prince only a few days ago, but he hadn't yet taken a fiancée for some reason. It wasn't clear why he hadn't, but it likely had to do with considerations of the power balance between the noble houses.

We narrowly avoided a struggle over who would be next in line for the throne, but I doubted Evan becoming the crown prince would silence the ambitious Royal Consort.

As a general rule, the Queen's son became King of Astra, while the son of a consort acted as insurance in case something happened to the Queen's son. If nothing happened to the Queen's son and he could ascend to the throne, the consort's son was removed from royal status and became a retainer of the new King.

That's why Evan, the son of the Queen, was allowed to carry the King's surname, Astrutte, while Heinrich took on his mother's surname, making him the Second Prince of Astra, Heinrich Hinentz.

"Your Highness," I said, greeting Evan and brushing him away casually as he raised a lock of my hair to his lips.

He was used to this. All he did was say, "How cold," with a disappointed smile.







I had seen noble and royal men over and over in my previous world. Flattering women was as natural to them as breathing. I'd learned a lot as a noble lady, particularly that a compliment from these men was considered appropriate manners and was a form of greeting, but I still couldn't get used to it.

As Evan and I walked side by side, I felt a commotion building behind us.

"What a sight," said Evan with a dry smile, looking to the source of the fuss.

I ignored it and kept on walking. I didn't need to look at something when I already knew what it was. Evan's eyes turned forward again quickly, and he walked along with me.

"Oh, morning, Selena, Evan!" called Rosemary.

Evan didn't respond. He couldn't respond to that because she'd called him by his first name without a title or his permission. If he responded, that would be the same as giving her permission to address him like that, and *that* would cause all sorts of speculations.

Normally, someone of the opposite sex (other than if they were engaged) wasn't allowed to call someone by their name without a title, and this was truer for royals. Rosemary, though, was under this ridiculous misconception that she was already royalty because she was engaged to royalty, meaning she didn't think her treatment of Evan was as disrespectful as it was.

"Rosemary, you must address him as 'Prince Evan,'" I said. "And it's not just 'morning.' It's 'good morning.'"

Rosemary giggled. "Oh, sister, are you still jealous? Just give it a rest, why don't you?"

"Excuse me?"

I had no idea what part of what I said could be taken as jealousy, but Rosemary's eyes were gleeful. She interpreted my warning as a sign of jealousy, which meant she probably thought she had a higher authority than me. She has no idea she's on a sinking ship that may go down at any moment. It's honestly hilarious.

"Rosemary will marry Prince Heinrich one day, meaning she'll be Prince Evan's

sister-in-law. It shouldn't be an issue for her to call him by his name," said a young man with green hair and eyes as he stepped forward as if to defend Rosemary. He was larger than other young noblemen his age, and even I, as a former assassin, had to acknowledge his well-trained physique. His name was Daniel Jackson.

He came from a long line of knights and hoped to become one someday. He likely worked hard every day for that goal. He was a diligent and straightforward person. Honestly, quite a few aspects of his personality deserved praise, but those same aspects were harming him now.

Rosemary was the weak former commoner terrorized by the nobility. And I, her sister, was also tormenting her, or so she said as she cried, becoming the cute lady clinging to him. He believed everything she said and turned hostile towards me.

He probably meant to intimidate me with that fierce glare of his, but to me, it felt like a puppy was trying to scare me. There wasn't a single thing there that would cause me fear.

I don't imagine he liked how bold I remained in response.

"You are correct that my fool of a sister will one day wed Prince Heinrich, at which point, she'll become Prince Evan's sister-in-law. However, she is still just his betrothed and is required as a noblewoman to maintain control over her behavior. While she may be Prince Evan's family in the future, she is not now, meaning she must have permission before addressing him without his title. As the son of Duke Jackson, you can't possibly be unaware of that, correct?"

"Urgh." Daniel was rendered speechless.

Rosemary glared at me. She must not have liked that. "Evaaaan," she nearly purred, turning misty eyes towards him as she tried to cling to his arm, but he slipped out of the way.

Rosemary looked at him in shock. Perhaps she hadn't thought he'd evade her. She quickly pulled herself together, though, and turned up the charm to max. "Evaaaan, my sister is bullying meee. She blames me because she can't find a husband, even though it's all her fault because of her horrible personality. Isn't that horrible? And she's after you, too, Evan. She doesn't know her place at all.

She thinks she's good enough to be queen."

Evan smirked. But, while his mouth was turned up, the depths of his eyes were cold. He always had a pitch-black aura he normally kept hidden, but he let it loose now.

"Evan?" said Rosemary.

Even I was so on edge I wanted to pull out the dagger I had hidden in my bosom.

Rosemary, a normal lady (though that was questionable), trembled in terror. Evan must have held back a little since she didn't pass out on the spot.

Even Daniel and his cronies paled despite being so spirited just a moment earlier.

At least on the surface, Evan was seen as a gentle prince who hated conflict, so seeing this side of him must have confused those young lords. It didn't matter how gentle and conflict-averse he was; he was still the prince who survived, crushing the strategies of the second prince and his ambitious mother. No prince who was just kind and gentle could do that, and these lords should understand that.

The upper echelons of society likely realized Evan's true nature, and he didn't attempt to hide it from them. His façade was nothing more than a tool that lulled fools like this into complacency and helped to smooth out negotiations.

Meaning he didn't have to bother hiding his true nature if he didn't want to. He could easily take that mask off if he decided he didn't need it. He decided he didn't need it now.

"Lady Rosemary, aren't you the one who doesn't know her place?" he said. "Who were you calling to? I have not given you permission to address me without my title. And you are Heinrich's fiancée. You will never be royalty. Once Heinrich is considered an adult, he will be removed from the royal family and given a new title. And, obviously, any children between you and Heinrich will not be in the line for the throne."

"Huh?"

There were sniggers from the crowd of onlookers when they heard Rosemary's shocked reaction.

"Oh, it looks like she didn't even know," said one.

"What sort of education are the Violettes giving their daughters?" said another.

"It would be a waste to give her an education suited to a duke's daughter. She doesn't even have a drop of noble blood in her."

"You are right there."

They intentionally spoke loud enough to be heard. Rosemary and her entourage heard it all. She turned red out of embarrassment and anger, then turned to glare at them, but they were used to the game of deceit. Her glare was as powerful as a kitten's. It had no effect. And it wasn't even cute like a kitten's glare.

Daniel put his arms around Rosemary in an attempt to comfort her while sending an intimidating look around at the others. While no one could make fun of a duke's son, everyone thought how shameless it was of him to hold another man's fiancée in his arms like that.

"And, Lady Rosemary, do you really think you should be paying attention to others right now?" Evan continued. "Your fiancé is the subject of some extreme rumors, after all."

"Urk."

While she might be putting together her own harem of men, Heinrich was doing the same with girls, too. He'd shown no improvements in that area, as he was still making advances on all sorts of girls. Rosemary refused to acknowledge this. He made fewer advances towards me these days, but they did come every once in a while.

He never sent a notice in advance when he was coming to visit our mansion, but Evan always sent me a letter letting me know Heinrich was coming, though I didn't know how he got wind of Heinrich's impromptu visits. There was barely any time between when that letter would arrive and when Heinrich would arrive, though, since they were surprise visits.

I wanted to send him on his way for being rude, but I couldn't do that with a prince.

The son of a consort usually received a title of marquess or higher once he became an adult, but Heinrich was likely to get count or lower if he didn't correct his problematic behavior. There was even a possibility he wouldn't get any title if things played out badly.

But neither Heinrich nor his mother seemed aware of that danger. The Royal Consort spoiled her son, and she perhaps was exceptionally unaware of these dangers since she intended to kill Evan and make Heinrich the crown prince. However, all her attempts so far had failed.

She'd lately been sending assassins like me at Evan. I honestly considered sneaking into the palace and killing her, but it wasn't like anyone would be paying me for that work. I decided to ignore the issue for now.

"At the very least, make sure you work hard so that Heinrich doesn't abandon you," said Evan. "If you'll excuse us, then. Let's go, Selena."

"Yes, Your Highness."

Heinrich's goal when coming to our mansion had always been me. He had never had his eyes set on Rosemary. Naturally, he would stop coming as often when he decided other more convenient girls were better than me, who wouldn't give in to him.

Rosemary probably realized that as well. There was panic in her eyes.

Why, though? Why was she panicking? Because he might toss her aside? She'll likely end up a commoner again if he does. She'll lose her current lifestyle. Is that why? Because she's thinking about that?

Or does she truly love Heinrich in her own way?

What actually *is* love?

"Selena, what's wrong?" Evan asked.

"Nothing, Your Highness."

I'd received plenty of assassination requests in my previous world, giving reasons like, "The person I loved betrayed me," or, "I want to take back the

person I love.”

I never understood why people clung so tightly to something as abstract as that.

It’s not like you can’t live without love. I’m proof of that. I lived until that knight took me down with him. That’s proof that “love” isn’t an inevitability of life.

Yet people cling to it like they’re obsessed with it. It’s foolish to wave about something like that when you don’t even need it to survive. I don’t get it. And, unlike my last life, I have parents in this reincarnation. I have shelter from the rain and no fear of starvation, but that still hasn’t helped me understand.

“...Ridiculous,” I muttered.

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“I heard something interesting, Lady Selena.”

Once I parted ways with Evan, Scarlanette Jordan swaggered out of nowhere in a way that nearly made me imagine a sort of *bah-dum* sound effect. She was flamboyant in dress and expression, just like always.

“They say your dear little sister is at it again,” she said. “Everyone’s chattering about how she looks like a prostitute, showing up at the academy with a line of boys in tow. And, apparently, she was rude to Prince Evan, too? I know she’s engaged to Prince Heinrich, but that is going too far. Your father may be a duke, but the Violettes don’t have a strong standing socially. And your mother makes no attempts to engage with the social sphere, meaning the family has so few connections. Speaking of connections, I imagine you have fewer than even a count’s family, like mine. Don’t you think you should make sure Lady Rosemary stays in her place, considering the unstable position your family is in? You’ll easily lose your footing if you simply rest on your duke laurels.”

Incredible. She said all that without taking a single breath. I wouldn’t have thought that possible for a normal, frail noble lady. They’re generally so weak they call a carriage to go a distance that would take only ten minutes to walk. She has quite the lung capacity for a noble.

“Are you going to say anything?” she demanded.

“You’re right, I should have responded. You went to the trouble of giving me this warning, after all,” I said.

“You need to reevaluate your arrogant attitude and listen to me.”

Scarlanette’s entourage got angry at me for not saying anything and came to back her up. They were foxes taking advantage of a tiger’s menace. They likely wanted to take advantage of Scarlanette to hit me with their frustrations towards Rosemary.

“The reason I didn’t say anything wasn’t because I was ignoring you,” I said. “I didn’t see any need to argue with you since everything you said was correct.”

“Huh?” Scarlanette was shocked, likely not expecting me to agree with her. Contrary to her, her entourage threw insults with as much vigor as drowning fish put back in the water.

What vulgar ladies. I saw many noble ladies in my former life, and they all were the sort of people who lived to take others down a notch. Yet, they despise us and think we’re filthy. It doesn’t matter that they use those they think of as dirty; they still honestly see themselves as the noblest of beings.

*Nobles are contradictory just by existing.*

I’ve lived as a noble for sixteen years and still don’t understand it. I don’t expect I will ever understand it.

“I rarely see Prince Heinrich with Lady Rosemary these days,” said Scarlanette, continuing with her attack once she got a hold of herself again.

“Rarely” wasn’t the right word. “Never” would be more accurate.

It seemed like Scarlanette disliked me from the moment we met. Maybe she has a thing for Evan? That would explain why she can’t stand me, someone who’s gotten close to him.

What an incredible annoyance.

I would never have become close with Evan if not for the situation with Heinrich and Rosemary. Who would ever choose to involve themselves with someone as troublesome as Evan?

“Don’t you think he’ll just toss her aside if things keep going like this?” said



Scarlanette. “She may have been adopted by a duke, but she’s still just a loathsome commoner. She isn’t suited for His Highness.”

She was probably trying to attack me indirectly by going after Rosemary since she couldn’t attack the true daughter of a duke like me directly. She implied we were to blame for Rosemary’s lack of a proper upbringing and that we were insane to bring a former commoner into our noble house.

## Eleven: What You Get for Seeking Love

**SCARLANETTE'S** words proved true before long.

"Oh, Prince Heinrich, you're so funny."

Lately, people often saw Heinrich with a cute girl with purple hair and eyes, and around that time, he stopped fooling around with random girls.

"Yuliarden Kreift, the daughter of Viscount Kreift and a maid," Evan told me. "The viscount's wife discovered he had a child with a mistress and chased the maid from their home. Yuliarden and her mother went to live in the slums, but the viscount's wife died recently. He pulled some strings to get the two of them back."

I hadn't asked Evan for this explanation, but he was suddenly beside me, telling me everything about Heinrich's new lover.

Heinrich and Yuliarden sat at the fountain in the center of the courtyard, talking to each other. Yuliarden opened her mouth wide as she laughed, her whole body showing how much fun she was having. A noble lady wouldn't dare act in such a way. It was unseemly.

"Heinrich, apparently, said he'd 'found true love,'" said Evan.

Rosemary rushed over to the pair enjoying their conversation. I couldn't hear what she said, but I could read lips, so I could tell she was flinging insults along the lines of, "How dare a filthy girl from the slums put a hand on my fiancé," and "You're just taking advantage of Prince Heinrich's kindness. How disgusting." She was normally all purrs and softness in front of Heinrich, but that mask was gone now.

Yuliarden stared at Rosemary in confusion, and Heinrich moved to put himself between her and Rosemary. "You're just a woman interested in my status," he said. "Don't you dare harm the woman I love!" Then, he pushed her.

Yuliarden's lips curled up slightly when she saw that. Despite all his

philandering, Heinrich didn't seem a good judge of a woman's character. He probably only ever looked at surface things, anyway.

Well, this looks like it'll turn into another mess.

"You're not going to help her?" asked Evan with a look that seemed to say he thought that was the obvious course of action, even though I turned my back to the quarreling couple in disinterest.

"Why should I? It's not like she broke her leg. She can at least get herself back up to her feet. She was raised as a commoner; she's not like a weak noble girl raised without ever scraping a knee," I said.

"This isn't about whether or not she's injured. She'll be hurt emotionally."

"It won't kill her."

"You are extreme. You're almost like a soldier who's lived their whole life with the threat of death looming over them. If you leave an injury because it's so small it won't kill you, it could still fester, causing your limb to rot and fall off. Or you might catch a disease that does kill you."

"But—" I started, but Evan took my hand.

"If you are ever hurt, I don't care how minor the wound is. I will always treat it," he said with a smile.

Looking at that face unsettled me. It wasn't an unpleasant feeling, but it had the potential to draw out emotions I didn't have. That scared me, so I pushed his hand away.

He didn't get angry. He smiled wryly, but something about it seemed sad.

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### **Side View: Rosemary**

I don't like it.

I was supposed to marry a prince and live happily ever after. I thought that's what would happen.

The first time Heinrich came to our mansion, he only had eyes for Selena. She may be a pureblood noble, but no man will ever want her, especially since she's

arrogant and haughty. I expected Heinrich to realize what she was like and lose interest in her. It would've been weird for him not to. I don't care how pretty she is; a bad personality like that will send men packing. They say men tire of a beautiful woman after three days, after all.

But it's more like he gave up on ever catching her, even though he knew what she was like. Well. He is kind, so he probably didn't want to just abandon her altogether. He still tries to connect with her once in a while, but I can let that much go.

Because I'm not like Selena.

And Heinrich's finally realized how amazing I am. He's starting to look at me. I knew he loved me. I mean, he's the one who asked me to marry him. Every time he comes to the mansion, he always asks to share my bed. It makes me so happy to be wanted by him.

My idiot sister hasn't realized yet, though, that I'm not like her. He chose her for a fling, but he really, truly loves me. He asked me to marry him, after all!

Isn't that right, Heinrich?

That's why I'm happy to answer your desires. I gave you my first, too, because you asked for it. How many times have our bodies entwined? It made me so happy that you would want me. I could feel your love for me every time.

But... I don't understand why my heart always feels so empty, then.

I used to be a commoner, but now I'm the adopted daughter of a duke. I'm engaged to a prince. I should be happy. I won. I beat Selena with her snootier-than-thou face.

But my heart isn't full.

I made lots of friends when I started going to the academy because I'm so cute. Well, most of them are the sons of lower-ranking nobles.

I haven't made a single girl friend out of the noble ladies. I don't know why. They must be jealous of how cute I am. Or Selena is stopping them. She has such an itty-bitty heart. How horrible do you have to be to be jealous of your own sister's happiness?

“Heinrich hasn’t said anything, has he?”

Most men would be jealous if their fiancée was friends with a lot of men besides him. But Heinrich hasn’t said anything.

Why not?

Doesn’t he love me?

Just when that uncertainty was growing bigger, and bigger, and bigger, and bigger...

“Prince Heinrich hasn’t been going on his usual night trysts lately,” I overheard one girl saying.

“Instead, he’s picked up this filthy girl from the slums named Yuliarden,” said another.

“Oh, does that mean he’s tossed Lady Rosemary aside already?”

“I can’t believe after her, a former commoner, he went to a girl raised in the slums. Prince Heinrich clearly has a thing for defective items, heehee.”

They stood there in the hallway, sniggering.

“Eeek!” they shrieked as I threw the water from a vase in the hallway on them.

That felt good.

“How dare you?” said one.

But it wasn’t the time to be hanging around with them. I rushed around the academy to find Heinrich. And I found them. Heinrich and this girl with purple hair, having fun talking to him at the fountain in the courtyard.

“...She’s nothing compared to me,” I told myself.

But I didn’t believe it.

“Heinrich,” I called, and he scowled like I was some gross little insect.

“Who is that lady?” said Yuliarden. She smiled and stood.

Now, I’m a woman too, but even I blushed when I saw her. I also felt sick for some reason.

“My name is Yuliarden Kreift,” she said. “Nice to meet you.”

“Huh. Raised in the slums, and you have a name? A surname even? That’s surprising,” I said. “And here I thought you were so scheming you took advantage of Heinrich’s kindness to sneak into the academy.”

Yuliarden turned red and looked down.

“How dare a filthy girl from the slums put a hand on my fiancé,” I said.

“No, we’re just friends,” she insisted.

“You’re just taking advantage of Prince Heinrich’s kindness. How disgusting.”

Friends? Yeah, right. If they were just friends, there wouldn’t be rumors about them being lovers.

“Rosemary, don’t think you can push people around just because you’re my fiancée,” said Heinrich.

“Heinrich? Eeek!”

He pushed me. Hard. And I fell on my butt. His eyes were so cold as he looked down at me. I’d never had anything like that happen to me; I didn’t know what to do.

“You’re just a woman interested in my status,” he said. “Don’t you dare harm the woman I love!”

“The...woman you...love?” I repeated, the words like fire on my tongue.

What did he just say?

*I’m* the one you love. You picked me to marry you.

“Haha.”

“Urk!”

She laughed. This girl, with her dirty slum upbringing, looked down at me and laughed.

I won’t forgive her. I will never forgive her.

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**“LEAVE it.”**

The only topic of gossip in the academy these days was how Heinrich had rejected Rosemary. But the engagement was still on. His newest partner was the daughter of a viscount raised in the slums. Unlike Rosemary, the adopted daughter of a duke raised as a commoner, this girl's status was so far below Heinrich's that allowing the two to be together wouldn't benefit the Royal Consort's faction.

They would never approve of him breaking off his engagement with Rosemary or becoming engaged to Yuliarden. And that fact only fed the rumor mill more.

Apparently, Rosemary was going to be the trophy wife while Yuliarden was his true wife. Now, Rosemary's own arrogant, haughty attitude was hurting her. Plenty of people enjoyed spreading these rumors, but none sympathized with her and held out a helping hand.

Everyone was enjoying it.

"You're probably loving this, aren't you, Selena?" Rosemary hissed, a torn-up textbook in her hands that belonged to Yuliarden.

Yuliarden's belongings had recently gone missing or were found destroyed, and someone even poured dirty water on her from the second floor of the academy, soaking her to the bone.

I suspected it wasn't all Rosemary's doing. People who didn't like Yuliarden were setting it up to look like it was all Rosemary. In the end, she'll probably be blamed for it all.

And Yuliarden seemed quite a strong person. Every time one of these things happened, she'd go and cling to Heinrich, crying, and he would explode in rage. Rosemary's actions weren't breaking Yuliarden's spirit at all. Instead, they spurred her and Heinrich even closer together, making it a wasted effort.

"No, I'm not enjoying this," I said.

*I don't care enough about you for it to matter to me.*

"Selena..." said Rosemary, her eyes tearing up for some reason.

"I just think you're reaping what you sowed," I stated blandly. "Who was it that surrounded themselves with good-looking boys? Who was it that thought

they could get away with anything because they were engaged to Prince Heinrich?”

“I just... But...” She tried to make up some excuse, but nothing came out. She hung her head and fell silent.

“Rosemary, who is left by your side? Give good thought as to whether Prince Heinrich is worth going this far for.”

She didn’t say anything.

All those people who’d been hanging around her, enchanted by her cuteness, saw now her relationship with Heinrich was rotten even though it looked good on the surface, and they saw her attitude when she attacked Yuliarden. Now they were saying Rosemary wasn’t who they thought she was, that they thought she was sweeter than that and left her for it, or because they were afraid the sparks of Heinrich’s dislike flying around Rosemary would land on them if they stayed too close.

“You don’t understand how I feel!” she shouted, then ran away crying.

It’s not like it’s worth crying over the prince being stolen; he’s just her fiancé. I don’t think he’s that captivating.

Well, if she ignores my warning and messes with Yuliarden again, I’ll eliminate her since she’ll be interfering with my life, too. I don’t think anyone would complain about her disappearing at this point.

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**“ROSEMARY** Violette, I hereby break off our engagement.”

After my warning, Rosemary must have rethought things because she stopped hassling Yuliarden. However, that didn’t stop this absolute moron.

Heinrich’s arm was around Yuliarden’s waist as he made that declaration to Rosemary in the middle of the courtyard, with countless students watching.







What an idiot.

I should have taken out this stupid prince.

“You have hurt Yuliarden with your wicked bullying,” he claimed. “Therefore, you are unsuited to marry me, a prince. I end our engagement and propose marriage to Yuliarden.”

“Oh, Heinrich,” said Yuliarden as she embraced him in a supposed rush of emotions. Her ample bosom pressed against him, and a look of dumb ecstasy spread over his face.

“Rosemary, for the crime of harming Yuliarden, the future princess, I banish you from this kingdom. Leave immediately,” he said.

“Please wait a moment.”

I was the one who spoke. Rosemary looked at me, almost begging me for help as she sat crumpled on the ground, trembling, her face pale.

As an assassin, I’d only ever had people look at me in fear or hostility. That look felt odd to me, but it wasn’t like I cared what sort of life Rosemary led after this. I wasn’t standing in front of her to protect *her*.

I only ever acted for myself. This, too, was for myself.

“Please provide solid evidence of her crimes if you are sentencing her to banishment,” I said. “Also, your engagement to Rosemary was agreed upon through negotiations between our two families. His Majesty the King permitted this engagement, meaning you require his permission again to break it off. This is, therefore, not a decision you can make on your own, Your Highness.

“In addition, that girl is the daughter of a viscount. Even if it were true that Rosemary terrorized her, it is not possible to enact severe punishment when someone of a higher rank attacks someone of a lower rank, even if that behavior is unbefitting of a lady. That may seem unfair, but this is what it means to live in a society based on status. It was the same principle at play when you used your authority to harm Rosemary’s dignity continually, and she was unable to say anything in protest.”

It was true that Rosemary had been bullying Yuliarden, but this wasn’t about

the truth. So long as there was no solid evidence, it might as well have never happened. That meant we just had to insist she didn't do it.

And the "harm Rosemary's dignity continually" comment was a jab at Heinrich's playboy behavior. He continued that with no regard for his engagement to Rosemary, and there were many times when he disrespected her or manipulated her for his own purposes. He even tried to get involved with me, the older sister of his fiancée. Everyone was aware of his lack of scruples. Too many people had seen it.

Heinrich didn't seem aware that his actions could negatively impact his standing or reputation. He made no attempt to hide his philandering even though he was engaged. It wasn't uncommon among noble and royal marriages for there to be another lover outside the relationship since their marriages were assumed to be about strategy. Marriage was about obligation; love was separate.

However, this custom received only tacit approval and only after certain conditions were met, including that the two were actually married, that they had fulfilled their obligations to each other, and that they protected their partner's public dignity to a small degree, at least.

Heinrich was still just a student, they weren't married, and he hadn't fulfilled his obligations to Rosemary, meaning it definitely was not acceptable for him to openly sleep around. Especially since he was engaged to a lady carrying the name of a duke, even if she was adopted.

Rosemary surrounded herself with all those boys as her way of mounting a tiny resistance against his actions. I convinced everyone that she did it out of a woman's desire to make her partner jealous. In reality, Rosemary kept them around because she simply liked boys, and there was no acceptable excuse for what she did, but since no one could actually see into her inner workings, there was nothing wrong with me adjusting that reality.

"At this moment in time," I continued, "the proper steps have not been taken to absolve this engagement. Rosemary is still your betrothed, Your Highness, not Yuliarden. And should an engagement between you and Yuliarden become a reality, you have no authority to sentence Rosemary even if she displayed

unladylike behavior towards Yuliarden. That is the King's role since it would fall under abuse of station."

Heinrich called Yuliarden the future princess, but once he was an adult, he would be removed from the royal family and placed among the nobility. Yuliarden would only be a princess for a very short time. I wondered if they both understood that.

"And as compensation for subjecting Rosemary to this humiliation in public, as well as for making up excuses for breaking off the engagement without consulting us, the house of Duke Violette demands reparations," I said.

"You're asking for money from the royal family?" said Heinrich.

Oh, what an idiot. Nobody said anything about the royal family.

"Prince Heinrich, I addressed that demand to you, specifically. It is not addressed to the royal family," I said.

"It means the same thing."

"No, it does not. The reparations would not come from the royal family's coffers but from your personal funds. Or perhaps from the assets of your legal guardian, the Royal Consort. No one without the authority to use the royal surname of Astrutte is capable of using the royal family's funds for whatever they see fit. You are not the same as Prince Evan."

"Urk." Heinrich's face turned beet-red with rage. The vein in his temple looked ready to burst. It seemed I'd incurred his royal wrath.

*He's as easy to manipulate as I imagined. Now, dance for me.*

"How dare you," he said. "Execute this girl now for insulting royalty."

*Oh, what a fool.*

He gave his order to the students his age, who acted as his guard by attending the academy at the same time. While they were students, they carried swords since they were also guards.

They didn't know what to do. Their eyes darted between me and Heinrich. They were right to refuse to follow that order. Heinrich wasn't going to like it and would likely treat them to a tongue-lashing, but there was no need to be

frightened of a child's temper tantrum.

Heinrich had no authority to demand my execution. They would be committing a crime if they did as he ordered and turned their swords on me.

"What are you doing?!" he shouted. "Kill her now!"

"B-But, Your Highness—"

"Enough! You incompetent fools. You're removed from duty!" Heinrich drew the sword from one of the student's scabbards and rushed at me in an attempt to kill me.

"Selena!" Rosemary panicked. Chaos broke out in the crowd. As royalty, Heinrich would have learned to wield a sword. I could tell from the way he moved that knew how to handle it, a little at least. But he would have only learned the minimum required of his station. He'd never wielded a weapon in real battle. To me, he looked like a child waving a stick around.

I took one step to the side. His sword hit nothing but air, and his center of gravity shifted forward, so I stuck out a foot and tripped him.

"Agh!" He slammed ungracefully face-first into the ground. "S-Stop this ridiculousness. How much do you intend to mock me?"

"That's enough," came a voice.

Heinrich was in the process of standing to try and kill me again, dirt smearing his face, when Evan appeared along with guards who forced Heinrich to the ground.

"Agh!" His face was pressed to the ground again, adding even more dirt to it.

"Aaaah!" shrieked Yuliarden as Evan's guards restrained her.

"What are you trying to do? Evan, you bastard!" yelled Heinrich. "How dare you lay a hand on Yuliarden!"

"Both of you are suspected of inciting this farce," said Evan. "As you should be. You're a fool for letting this girl manipulate you like a puppet."

Heinrich glared up at Evan from the ground, but Evan smirked because glaring was all Heinrich could do.

“The fact that you would get so worked up by a lady’s attempts to rile you that you would draw a sword on her proves you’re a fool,” said Evan.

He was right. I knew Heinrich had an inferiority complex when it came to Evan. No matter what he did, he could never win against his older brother. And Evan was the Queen’s son, while Heinrich was the Royal Consort’s son. That in and of itself meant he could never be king.

As he pitied himself, he set himself up as the fake hero of his own little tragedy because that was comfortable. It was only natural he grew to hate Evan. I used that and made him draw that sword. I did it all to form a chink in the royal family’s armor.

“His Majesty has already been informed of this incident,” said Evan. “You’ll await his response in the palace. Take them away.”

The knights dragged off Heinrich and Yuliarden. Heinrich struggled against their grasp the whole way while Yuliarden kept screaming, “I had nothing to do with it!”

I wished she would realize it was pointless and give it a rest.

## Twelve: An Incredible Gift

**“YOU** are a proud descendant of nobles. You should know what the right thing to do is.”

*Oh my god, this is so annoying.*

Yesterday, Heinrich was sentenced to house arrest until further notice for publicly breaking off his engagement to Rosemary without consulting our family, as well as for his obvious intent to kill me.

Obviously, the person elegantly sipping tea in front of me couldn't just wait quietly for further notice. It was Heinrich's mother, the Royal Consort, Hera Hinentz.

I was trying to go to the academy when one of Hera's servants showed up and told me to come to the palace, practically forcing me to see Hera.

They're mocking me.

I don't care if she is the Royal Consort. Could you possibly request someone's presence more rudely? She's treating me like it's perfectly natural to ignore everything I have going on. She is as clueless about her place as her stupid son is. Seriously, how dumb can they be?

“The right thing to do?” I said.

*Meaning, I should drop my charges against Heinrich, right?*

I obviously wouldn't do that. That would only destroy my reputation.

“A subject should not damage the good name of royalty,” said Hera.

“I think there has been some misunderstanding,” I said.

“A misunderstanding?” Her brow crinkled. It wasn't threatening or frightening in the least. Did she think I would grovel before her if she waved about her authority in an attempt to coerce me?

“I haven't damaged any royal's good name,” I said.



“How unashamed are you? You have falsely accused a prince.”

“It’s up to His Majesty to determine if my accusations are false, not you, Lady Consort. Please direct your thoughts to the king, not me.”

“Shut your impertinent mouth, you! I should have known what to expect from a daughter of the family who let a foul commoner into their house. It seems your noble blood is different from my own, you filthy-blooded girl,” Hera spat. Then, she made a big show of opening her fan to hide her mouth and nose, like she was trying to say a horrible smell was wafting off me.

“I will acknowledge that we are an unusual family for bringing a commoner amongst us,” I said, “but we are not nearly as unusual as Prince Heinrich, who abused his station with such a blasé attitude.”

WOOSH.

Hera threw her folding fan at me, but I easily avoided it. I was well aware that what I said would offend her, but so what? I didn’t have to flatter her, and I didn’t have to let her attack me intentionally.

“Your family is a disgrace; the title of duke is nothing but decoration,” she said. “Are you sure you want to take that sort of attitude with me? I could easily destroy your family with the power of the Hinentz house.”

No, you couldn’t. I’ll admit Amaryllis isn’t that active socially, so we have few connections, but have you forgotten? The Violettes are involved in expansive industries. Do you not understand what that means? What an idiot.

Being involved in a wide variety of industries means we have connections to just as many merchants. One word from us would stop all merchants from coming to Astra. And my father, the duke, has strong connections with the royals and nobles of other countries because he travels from place to place for his business. He’s a duke for a reason.

What will you do if merchants no longer come in or leave Astra? Do you think the country could withstand it if all foreign commerce halted? Oh, but you wouldn’t understand even if I told you. You don’t have the brains to comprehend these systems.

So I just smiled slightly, not explaining a single thing. “I look forward to seeing

the power of the family of Marquess Hinentz you are so proud of, Lady Consort.” However, your family is laden with debt because of its extravagant spending. “I don’t believe the two of us have much else to discuss, so if you’ll excuse me,” I said.

A lady-in-waiting brought the fan Hera threw back to her, and I heard it snapping behind me as I left.

What a temper.

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“**I**M exhausted.”

I didn’t have the energy to go to the academy, so I went home after that. Classes were not out yet, so the servants were surprised to see me home at this time.

“What happened, Selena, dear?” asked Amaryllis. “Are you feeling unwell?” She touched my cheek, looking concerned. I casually moved her hand from my face. It was warm and felt uncomfortable.

“The Royal Consort summoned me to talk about what happened with Prince Heinrich breaking off his engagement with Rosemary. It was draining,” I said.

“Ah, the Royal Consort... That must have been difficult on you.”

I didn’t say anything. I couldn’t help thinking, *I didn’t expect much from you, but is that really all you have to say?*

It was absurd of Hera to insist I go to the palace without considering my schedule or giving advance notice. This sort of thing should even make our family submit a grievance to the court.

I just got more and more tired, having to deal with Amaryllis after having to deal with that woman.

“Yes, it was difficult,” I said, though she probably wouldn’t even notice the bite in my tone. “That’s why I’m taking the day off from classes. May I go to my room?”

“Of course. I’ll contact the academy. You have a nice rest.”

Once in my room, I flopped on my bed, even though I knew it was poor manners. Noble ladies are so constrained they're not even allowed to do that. No one ever complained when I was an assassin as long as I did my job perfectly. Well, some adults tried to pick a fight with me when I was a kid, but I killed them all. I didn't have to worry about what sort of person I was dealing with.

"Lady Selena, you'll get wrinkles in your uniform if you lay down in it. It'll make Marin cry," said Tiegel as he came in with tea and biscuits.

"Hey, Tiegel, have you ever been in love?" I asked.

He didn't answer right away.

I sat up on the bed. I tugged at the cloth to smooth out the wrinkles a little so Marin wouldn't have so much trouble with them.

"No, I haven't," he said. "Have you found someone you like?" He muttered something, too, which sounded like, "Please not that black-hearted prince," but I wasn't quite sure I heard him, and something about his tone sounded frightened, so I didn't prod him about it.

"No, there isn't anyone," I said.

"Did the Royal Consort say something? Or...there isn't talk of you marrying, is there? Is she introducing you to someone?"

"No, of course not any of that. Even if she suggested someone, I'd turn them down. Even though I know noble marriages are all about obligation. It doesn't matter what the couple wants." I didn't have a problem marrying someone out of obligation. It wasn't any different from taking on an assassination job. "It's just I don't have any desire to get on a sinking ship. I'm not suicidal. What happened started me thinking."

Heinrich had ambitions and no qualms about killing Evan and putting himself in line for the throne. It was good to have pawns, too, especially if they were pawns you could use. The Violettes were pawns he could use.

Even if we didn't have many domestic connections, we were well-known outside the country's borders and had money. Heinrich was born at a disadvantage because he was the Royal Consort's son; he needed the Violettes

to get the throne. No matter how big a fool he was, he should be able to figure that much out with a little thinking. That's why he didn't break off his engagement to Rosemary all these years, even if he looked down on her.

But he did, now. And for the bastard daughter of a viscount, someone who would bring him no benefits whatsoever.

"To Heinrich, maybe Yuliarden was so precious she was worth giving up his status and a chance at the throne. Maybe the person you love is more valuable than any gold and jewels," I said.

"You are important to me, Lady Selena."

I looked at him and saw he was looking straight at me.

"You're more important to me than gold and jewels," he said. Tiegel may always have a blank expression, but that didn't mean he was hard to read. Right now, he looked like a puppy wagging its tail so hard it might break into a million pieces. That's how happy he looked to be talking to me.

I didn't know if the affections he felt towards me were love or more like devotion to his master, like a dog. Maybe I could understand if I'd ever been in love.

As I thought that, images flitted through my mind. Of Rosemary struggling pointlessly after losing her composure. And Heinrich destroying his own future by forgetting his place and causing a scene.

...Uh, no. Let's not.

If love really did cause this mess, I don't need any part of it.

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**RICK** told me Hera sent an assassin after me. Apparently, something I said offended her during our teatime meeting. She just jumped straight to killing someone who got in her way. People like her always go on about how they're nobler beings, the chosen, the special, different from everyone else, but their violent tendencies are exactly the same as those who live in the darkness who they find so repulsive for being impure.

"My lady, they've come," said Tiegel.

“I see. You don’t have to do anything. They don’t seem that much of a threat.”

“But—”

“Here they are.”

I pulled the dagger I’d come to like lately. I often used it for work.

A metallic scent. The blood flying through the air felt warm against my skin, but it quickly cooled. Maybe that stickiness felt so disgusting because I hadn’t done this for so long.

Hera must have set this up right after I left. When she couldn’t get the outcome she wanted, she sent assassins. Does she really think the charges will be withdrawn if I die? Both mother and son are unfortunately lacking in brains.

But it seems she couldn’t hire quality assassins. They were far too weak.

“What a mess,” I sighed. My hair, face, hands, clothes, and the floor.

“I’ll wipe it off, Lady Selena,” said Tiegel. I don’t know when he got it, but he used a pure white towel to wipe the blood splatter from my hands and face. It turned red almost instantly. You could never get blood out once it stained something like that. We’d have no choice but to throw the towel out.

If that knight hadn’t taken me down with him, I likely would have been thrown out someday just like this towel. It was basically a daily occurrence to see that sort of trash thrown into the trash heaps. No one would have batted an eye.

What about now?

I looked at Tiegel, tenderly wiping me clean like I was something that might break under his touch. What would he do if I died? He’d probably go back to his normal life, not batting an eye.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Nothing.”

“Grk, gah, ah, gah...” One of the assassins, barely breathing, coughed up large amounts of blood. He would be dead in a few minutes.

I didn't feel anything looking at one of the corpses on the floor. I didn't even feel fear when I stared into those vacant eyes, like looking into an abyss.

When was the first time I killed a person? Who was it? There were a lot of people I wanted to kill. A lot of people I did kill. What was I thinking the first time I killed someone?

What did I feel? How did it feel?

I can't remember any of it.

All I could feel now was the fresh blood clinging to my hair. I could only smell the metal...

"...Unpleasant," I said.

Let's clean this up. A mere commotion was the best we could hope for if a servant or one of my family members walked in right now. Even if I was an assassin in my past life, in this life, I was a noble girl who couldn't fight.

"This trash... We should send it back to where it came from," I said, then I cut the heads from the bodies. I wanted to send the whole corpses, in all honesty, but that would be a feat, so I'd have to settle for just the heads.

"Evening. You take care of everything?" said Rick as he came in through the window. He looked at the corpses on the floor and gave a lopsided smile. "You made a show of it, huh? What're you going to do with this?"

"The heads go back to their mistress. The rest can be disposed of," I said dryly.

"Understood. Come on, clean up time," called Rick. Several people dressed in black came in. They worked for Rick in the Dark Guild and mostly cleaned up bodies. We generally called them "cleaners" for that.

The cleaners tossed the remaining parts of the corpses out the window along with my blood-soaked nightclothes. Then, they also left through the window. They dragged the bodies and the clothes deep into the garden where few people ever went and buried them there, then sprinkled the area with some powder with a smell dogs hated.

They cleaned the floor, and all evidence of what had happened was

eliminated. It was a good thing there were no witnesses. There would have been more trash to clean up if there had been.

“All right, I’m off then,” said Rick. “I bet that lady’s going to try something again, so keep an eye out.” And then he left.

“My bedroom window isn’t the front entrance,” I called.

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## **Side View: Hera**

“EEEEK!”

“Oh, would you *please* be quiet!” I was in the worst mood possible after that idiot of a maid woke me with her shriek. “What’s that? Something smells odd,” I said.

I rubbed my tired eyes and sat up, then felt something heavy roll off my lap and plop down beside me.

“What in the world?”

I reached out, my eyes blurred from just waking, and I felt something sticky and disgusting. Panicked, I looked at my hand.

“Is that...blood?”

I was fully awake now.

“Eeek! What the—!” I shouted.

Three heads were on the bed. I recognized those faces. They were the assassins I hired to kill that impudent girl. They were supposed to show her what happened when someone resisted me.

Then...why? Why are their corpses here? Were they killed? By that girl? How?

My investigations already told me she had no master warriors as her guards. Even if she did manage to kill them, how did she sneak them into the palace with its tight security?

Security was particularly strong in the royal rooms where people like the queen and royal consort slept. Those rooms were the deepest within the palace. Sneaking in was already a feat of extreme difficulty, let alone sneaking

into my room *carrying heads*.

"This way," I heard a voice.

"Lady Hera, are you all right?" asked a guard.

"Of course I'm not all right! Do something about this! Now!" I shouted.

The maid whose scream woke me had run out of the room. She must have gone to get the guards.

"Lady Hera, please move to the next room for now," said my maidservant, and I got out of bed.

"Urk," I gagged as my foot touched one of the heads rolling around. "Draw me a bath!"

"Y-Yes, my lady, at once."

Only my hand was dirtied with blood because I'd touched the things while still half asleep, but I still felt like my entire body was sullied by those foul objects in my bed.

"How...could this happen...?" I muttered.

I thought I'd show her what it meant to resist me. I wanted to teach that impudent little brat how harsh this world really is. I tried to use my family's power to incite her downfall, but our money stopped flowing for some reason.

I don't see any problem with cutting ties with any fool merchants who would rather listen to Duke Violette than my family, connected to me, the Royal Consort. Father and Mother told me we wouldn't be able to buy dresses or jewels if we let the merchants leave us, which was their reason for refusing to listen to my requests.

Apparently, a merchant had told them, "Trust is life to a merchant. Just as nobles value bloodline and status, we merchants value connections. I understand you are the family of the Royal Consort, but I cannot do anything to insult Duke Violette, with whom I've had a long relationship."

After that, the merchant stopped selling bulk to the Hinentz family as if trying to say they wouldn't have anything to do with us if we intended to somehow damage the Violette family.



I cannot fathom the reasoning. How in the world could anyone choose that poor excuse for a noble family, duke in name only, over me, the Royal Consort?

“My lady, just to be certain, you don’t know anything about these heads?” asked one of the guards.

“Of course I don’t know anything! Are you done? Get rid of them right now!”

I was already irritated, and this moronic knight’s question only irritated me more.

“What is it *now*?” I shouted as my maidservant came back.

“My lady, your bath is rea— Ah!”

I pushed her towards the bathroom. “Don’t just stand there. Come help me!”

“Y-Yes, my lady.”

Selena Violette. Don’t think you’ll get away with this.

## Thirteen: Selena's Lamentation

**ROSEMARY** and Heinrich's engagement was officially absolved one month after Hera summoned me. Though, it only took that long because that's how long we needed to contact our father, who was abroad, and wait for him to return home.

Art was furious at the Royal Consort's arrogant behavior. He went to the royal family to make them see how she insulted him and his family. It was no exaggeration to say the Violettes held the entire country's commerce in their hands with the wide range of businesses they were involved in.

With the memory of Hera's actions putting a halt to her family's trade still fresh in everyone's minds, the King himself publicly lowered his head in apology to Duke Violette.

A king normally never lowered his head to anyone as he had to maintain his appearance of dignity. The fact that he was forced to do that meant Heinrich and Hera's standing in court was greatly worsened, and people began slowly distancing themselves from the two to avoid getting involved with anything.

However, the royal family refused to pay us compensation for breaking off Rosemary's engagement because she was also at fault, meaning we only received compensation for when Heinrich embarrassed Rosemary in public.

Art seemed relieved that Rosemary and Heinrich's engagement had ended. Which wasn't surprising. No one wants an explosive that close to them.

This event also meant no one else stepped forward to express their desire to marry Heinrich. Being a man, no one would point fingers and laugh because he would marry late, but he would have difficulties finding a bride after this.

Either that, or he could marry his "true love," this daughter of a viscount, which would result in a viscount title for him.

Then they'd both get their just deserts.

Someone like Heinrich, who'd grown up living as royalty, the highest possible standing, would obviously not be able to handle life as a viscount, and the viscount family wouldn't be able to maintain a decent life for themselves if they were forced to take on the royal family's problem child.

Yuliarden probably believed Heinrich when he said he'd be king one day. His being king meant him killing Evan, the crown prince, and stealing his throne, but Yuliarden probably hadn't realized that implication.

Now that things had settled down, Hera had been confined permanently to her quarters, and Heinrich had been sent to a borderland area to become an ordinary knight to correct his personality.

Yuliarden was sent to a convent, and her father was reduced to the rank of baron due to his failure to educate her properly. His territory was returned to the kingdom.

And Rosemary?

"Selena, has Lady Rosemary already gone?" asked Evan. Today was the Festival of Hunting. He was wearing hunting garb and had a bow and quiver slung across his back.

The Festival of Hunting was primarily celebrated by the men, but the ladies were invited as well because the men would offer the spoils of the hunt to the woman they liked to request their feelings be returned.

I don't get why ladies go all aflutter, happy to receive gifts of raw meat. It just smells. And I don't think the animal that got killed would accept "courting" as the reason for its death. Nobles don't think of anything other than nobles as living creatures in the same way as them, so this pastime is very typical of such an arrogant class.

What a stupid celebration. But it was a custom, and the daughter of a duke couldn't refuse to participate.

Evan had checked that no one was eavesdropping before he asked about Rosemary. What happened between her and Heinrich was likely going to be the talk of the town for a while. Though, no one would openly gossip about it since it concerned the second prince.

“Yes, she left this morning,” I said.

Because of this event, Art discovered Rosemary had been surrounding herself with young noblemen like some sort of prostitute, and he gave her two options: be removed from his family and return to being a commoner, or enter a convent to go through her education again.

She bawled her eyes out because she didn’t want either option, but no matter how much Amaryllis tried to cover for the “poor dear,” Art didn’t budge. He said if she went back to being a commoner, he would help her find work and give her enough money to support herself for a year. I thought those were amazing terms, but Rosemary eventually chose to go to the convent. That option meant there was a path for her to relearn everything and return as a noblewoman in a duke’s family, but she was sent to a convent well known for receiving problem children. Her education was going to be harsh, and she would be entirely cut off from the outside world until she passed.

Considering Rosemary’s personality and life so far, I thought she’d be happier if she went back to being a commoner.

“She’ll marry late by the time she returns,” I said.

“You’re harsh on her,” Evan said. “Well, the festival’s about to start. I’ll be back later.”

“Good luck, Your Highness.”

“It’s customary for the hunter to offer his catch to the woman he loves,” he said.

“I’m aware...” I was confused why he was mentioning this now.

He took a lock of my hair and pressed it to his lips. “If I offered my catch to you, would you accept?”

I stiffened, not knowing how I should react. Tiegel, standing a step behind me, slapped Evan’s hand away.

“You’ve hurt me, servant,” said Evan.

“My apologies, Your Highness. There was an insect on the precious Lady Selena’s beautiful hair,” said Tiegel.

They locked eyes but said nothing else. Tiegel's expression was just as blank as always, and Evan's was the same small smile as always, but I could practically see two beasts hovering behind them, trying to intimidate the other.

As far as I'm aware, this is the first time I've ever seen them speak to one another. Why do they seem to dislike each other so much? They don't even know each other well enough to have a bad relationship.

"Ah, whatever," said Evan. "All that matters is to be the one who wins in the end. Don't think you have an advantage because you're always together. It's not hard for someone to come out of nowhere and win."

"I never imagined I had an advantage," said Tiegel.

I didn't understand their conversation in the slightest, but they also didn't seem inclined to explain it to me. After this and that, it was finally time, and Evan went off to the hunting grounds.

"Shall we move somewhere you can rest, my lady?" suggested Tiegel.

"Yes."

It would be a while before the men returned from the hunt.

I started walking in the opposite direction Evan went, and someone called out to me. "Lady Selena, do you have a moment?" It was Scarlanette. She somehow maintained a smile while also grimacing as she and her entourage pulled me by the hand to a seat prepared for me. "Lady Selena, I was so worried about you," she said.

*I really doubt you were.*

I actually imagined she'd had a good laugh at my expense. The only thing about her that seemed like a good, concerned friend was her expression.

"There's been quite a lot of fuss surrounding you lately, Lady Selena," she said.

"I knew the Violettes shouldn't have let a common girl into their household. She never understood her place but still acted like she'd become a *real* noble," said another one of the girls.

"Well, even if she did have the Violette name, she was still born a lowly

commoner. It seems there was no way of concealing her low class, hee hee,” said another.

“It was a good lesson for the Violettes,” said Scarlanette with a grin as she looked at me, and the other girls followed suit with sneers of their own.

“Asking around, I heard she’s an orphan,” continued Scarlanette. “No matter how much you pity someone, you shouldn’t let dirty blood sully your family. *Those* types accept charity like they deserve it and then ask for more. They don’t understand limits. They’re just filled with greed.”

“Lady Scarlanette is right. Because we’re nobles, they take everything we give them and never even thank us.”

“...*Noblesse oblige*,” I said, confirming.

“Exactly.” They all nodded, even though it wasn’t a question.

*Noblesse oblige*... There were fools of nobles in my last world, too, who would say those words and give alms to the poor. I remember a nobleman who gave me bread while saying, “Oh, poor thing.” I don’t remember his face, though. He was found dead later that night.

“Poor thing.” I used to loathe those words, and I didn’t know why. I do now.

They didn’t know anything about me, but they just went and assumed I was pitiful because they had more than me. They forced their goodwill on me and then had the nerve to demand gratitude.

I hated being pitied. So what if I’m wearing clothes like rags? So what if I’m as thin as twigs? Who got to decide that alone was a sign I was lacking?

They silently boast they’re happier and more blessed than me because they wear clothes that feel nice, decorate themselves with jewels, and eat wonderful food every day. I always thought about how I’d love to break their noses and throw them away in a ditch.

“Of course they don’t thank you,” I said.

“Lady Selena?”

“They never asked for your help.”

“Eep!”

*Ah, I need to recover this.* I accidentally let off a little hostile aura, and now they were all pale and staring at me. *Get a hold of your emotions. It’s okay; you’ve learned how to be a normal noble lady over these past sixteen years.*

*Get rid of that aura.*

*Now, smile.*

*Smile, just like a simple, innocent lady who knows nothing.*

“We shouldn’t be helping people just because we want their gratitude,” I said. “We help because we want to help. That’s all I meant.”

*Ugh. I think I’m going to be sick.*

“O-Of course. Th-That’s a lovely sentiment,” said one girl.

“Y-Yes. That’s what you’d expect from the true daughter of Duke Violette,” said another.

Scarlanette brought them along to help her insult me, but now they agreed with me because I frightened them with my accidental aura of hostility, which made them forget their real goal. It was almost like they were begging me not to kill them.

Not that I would. No normal noble lady kills people. If there’s someone she wants dead, she asks someone else to do it.

“B-By the way, Lady Selena,” said Scarlanette, trying to change the subject because she was frightened by where this seemed to be going, “lately, you seem rather close with Prince Evan. What is your relationship with him?”

“We’re just friends.”

“You don’t seem like just friends to me.”

Is she after Evan, like the first time we met, when she tried to keep me in check? Not surprising; he is the crown prince. Becoming queen was more than a pipe dream if the two fell in love. He still didn’t have a fiancée, perhaps because of the rumors surrounding him and me. Everyone was jumping through hoops to try and catch his eye.

But Scarlanette's father is only a count. Her family is far too weak for her to become the queen.

"After what happened with Lady Rosemary, you should be careful of your next move if you don't want to end up in the same situation," she said.

"You say amusing things, Lady Scarlanette," I said. "The way you say that could give others the wrong impression that I have the same inferior blood as Rosemary. Have you forgotten who you're speaking to, daughter of Count Jordan?"

I emphasized the "count" as much as I could and smiled at her to inform both her and her entourage that I, as the daughter of a duke, was of higher standing than her. They would realize their faux pas finally. Though, they should have realized this sort of thing before it was pointed out because they lived in the noble world where status was everything.

Noble girls were pampered as they grew up. They knew these things, in their heads at least, but they had a tendency to forget them when it was convenient for them. What helpful heads they have. Though, I don't see how they'll survive in a noble society like that. They'll make some fatal mistake, even if it's not towards me.

"Urk, that's...not how I meant it," said Scarlanette. "Please, forgive me."

If she was going to turn pale just because someone pointed out her status, she shouldn't go looking for a fight in the first place.

*Oh, how utterly tedious. If only this would be over alre—*

"Eeeeeeeek!"

A woman screamed so loud I thought my eardrums might burst. I could smell the metallic scent of lifeblood on the wind. A lot of it.

"Wh-What's going on?"

The noble ladies, who had been elegantly sipping tea only a moment before, stood up, confused, and looked in the direction of the scream. The attendants and maidservants stopped working.

"Lady Selena," said Tiegel, coming to stand next to me so he could handle



whatever happened, his hand on his weapon. He had the same sort of dagger I used hidden inside his jacket.

I focused my senses in the direction the scream came from, inside the forest.

The ladies who'd tired of the tea party were fine to stroll as far as the lake just inside the forest's entrance since that was still far from the hunting grounds. The scream must have come from one of them.

How many times did they stumble and fall as they ran, everyone's eyes on them, their dresses and faces dirtied? The ladies raced out of the forest, more than one wicked creature chasing behind them.

The party area erupted into commotion. Ladies shrieked and ran every which way, several of them tripping.

Today was the Festival of Hunting. Royals attended this festival, meaning a decently sized guard detail was assigned to the event, but the knights sent here were not meant to handle creatures like this. They wouldn't be able to handle them on their own.

They had to defend so the nobles could retreat, slowing the monsters down, but they also had to go to help Evan, who'd gone into the forest. Considering their numbers, there was no way there were enough knights to handle this.

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### **Side View: Evan**

**"YOU** seem rather interested in Lady Selena," said Judau, my attendant, the moment we entered the forest to hunt. "Do you plan to offer her your catch?"

"Are you opposed?" I asked.

"It's not my place to say anything. It's just that she is Lady Rosemary's sister, and while the rumors have stopped lately, there were many that she is quite an unpleasant lady."

I'd done all sorts of investigations into Selena when I first decided to make her my ally. I nearly went mad, considering how abnormal she was. It was almost impossible to believe she was raised by that vacant-headed mother of hers.

I questioned my own ears when I heard she didn't hesitate a moment to use a

cake knife to stab a feral dog that attacked her. She even pointed a sword at a rude guard and threatened him.

I got more excited every time I heard another report about her.

And when we met that fateful evening, she leaped over that wall with such ease, landing like an angel coming down from heaven. She stole my heart then.

Everything about her was interesting and unexpected.

She was supposedly a duke's daughter, raised lacking nothing, but the hostile aura she sometimes let off felt more like that of an experienced assassin. And, while she may not be consciously aware she does it, she walks silently, keeping her presence hidden at all times.

I easily learned what sort of environment she grew up in by investigating her parents' personalities. But, no matter how hard I looked, I couldn't find whatever caused her to grow into what she was.

"The servants of their house say she is arrogant, stubborn, and cold," said Judau.

"That is what they say."

"I thought you disliked ladies like that."

"I do."

"Are you saying that's not what she's really like then?"

"You determine the truth by looking with your own eyes, and I've determined she's not that sort of person. The problem is the servants. They conduct themselves horribly."

The servants had all become full of themselves because of the far too kind wife of the duke. They seemed to be under the misconception they could get away with anything. There was no way a servant should be able to speak ill of the daughter of their master, yet the servants who allied themselves with Rosemary insulted Selena like it was perfectly normal. I was furious when it reached the point where they were essentially terrorizing Selena.

I thought about how I should kill them, but they must have gone too far because Selena removed them from service before I could act.

“I doubt those servants will ever work in a noble house again,” I said.

At some point, I realized Selena was the only thing that ever caught my eye. When did she take over so much of my heart? She seems confused by it, but that, too, is amusing.

“Your Highness, Your Highness, there’s trouble!”

About an hour after the festival began, a knight flew towards us on a horse. I could tell with a look that this wasn’t an ordinary problem. Judau stopped his pointless chatter and tensed.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Th-The ladies, their tea party... Monsters...” said the knight.

“What?!”

*Selena!*

The very first thought to cross my mind was of her safety.

She prioritized her own life over all else and was excellent at evaluating situations. I didn’t think she would do anything extreme, but she rather liked confrontation, which seemed to be another thing she wasn’t aware of about herself. And, despite being a noble lady, she was experienced in combat. If she decided fighting was better than fleeing, she would run head first, alone, into combat without a moment’s hesitation.

While she normally put her own life above anything else, she at the same time didn’t seem to care about her life, to the point it made me think she had no fear of death while fighting.

I have no idea how a lady like her had been born to parents as happy-go-lucky as hers, and I also felt she was still hiding something from me. I wish she would trust me and tell me.

“Hurry to the palace and get reinforcements,” I ordered. “And healers. We’ll have a stream of injured.”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

With that, the knight who’d reported to me rushed off to the palace to get

aid.

I was certain Selena would never even imagine that I would go to her aid or that help was on the way. She only seemed to know humanity's ugliest aspects and believed that was our true nature. She wasn't wrong, but she also wasn't right.

Humans weren't just ugly. There were beautiful aspects as well. There were people who gave their all for others to the point they were willing to sacrifice themselves. I'd show her as much as I needed to.

If no one had ever shown her kindness so she could never know the warmth of humanity, then I would show her that kindness.

"We go to the battlefield!" I called.

"Yes, Your Highness!" shouted the others.

*Please, Selena. Please be safe.*

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**"SHE..."**

Flecks of fresh blood scattered through the air as a lone girl danced.

The scene was chaos, filled with the screams of people fleeing every direction and battle cries of the knights, too few to handle the monsters. In the midst of that, I saw her fighting, a single young noble lady behind her.

"Selena!" I shouted.

"No, Your Highness!" she called back.

I was running before I knew it. I was aware that, considering my position, this was not something I should have been doing. But I saw the threat looming over her and I moved before I could think.

"Evan!" she cried, her eyes wide with shock.

*Huh. I never thought I'd see an expression like that on your face.*

I shouldn't have felt happy in that moment, but I was, knowing I was the reason she made that expression.

***WHAT*** am I doing?

There's Scarlanette behind me, sitting on the ground. Her legs must have given out beneath her. Her entire entourage had already run.

Amazing.

They put themselves beside her to take advantage of her influence, and not a single one had the decency to pull her hand when she couldn't run.

That's what humans are, after all.

Everyone loves themselves most.

"Graaaaaar!"

The bear-like monster with wicked sharp claws roared and swung its right hand... Wait, right foreleg? Either way, it swung at me.

I cut it off with the dagger I had hidden on me. It thudded to the ground.

*What am I doing?*

I'm human. I love myself the most. Then...why am I fighting, hiding her behind me? She's just a nuisance, no matter how you look at it.

"Y-You're... You're not going to run?" she asked, shaking, tears and snot covering her face.

I checked on Tiegel who was defeating another monster nearby. He was from a war tribe and had exceedingly high combat abilities. He could easily handle the attacks from a monster on his own.

*He'll be fine. The knights, on the other hand...*

Several knights to one monster? That's normal. Especially when going toe-to-toe with large monsters like this. But we won't be able to handle this if they keep going like that.

"Owww! Nooo, I don't wanna die!"

"Somebody! Somebody save me!"

"You, knight! I'll pay you to protect me!"

There were ladies crying and sobbing, ladies mad with anger and panic, ladies crumpled on the ground, bleeding. These were the ones who hadn't escaped quickly enough.

There were too many monsters. The knights couldn't handle them.

"Turning my back in this situation would be suicide," I said.

The bear monster swung its remaining arm at me. I parried its long, sharp claws with my dagger.

"Damn," I said. The blow was too powerful. It broke my dagger, making it unusable.

"Lady Selena!" called Tiegel. He split the monster in front of him in two with a single strike and came to stand in front of me. He barely blocked the monster's attack, but the difference in strength was obvious. He couldn't overpower the monster in a head-to-head fight.

"Grr, it's strong," muttered Tiegel, and I smiled wryly because I'd been thinking the exact same thing.

It made me remember the knight I fought at the end of my previous life. I was alone then, but I'm not now. No enemy could stand against the two of us.

I tossed aside my broken dagger and pulled out my backup knife.

"N-No, I don't want to die! Somebody, help!" Scarlanette shrieked, panicking because the monster was coming to attack again.

*How annoying.*

In the moment when the monster was distracted by Tiegel, I thrust my knife at its eye, destroying it. The monster's howl echoed through the clearing.

"I don't want to die!" Scarlanette shouted again. The monster's howl sent her into even more of a panic.

Maybe I could just kill her, along with the monster. Everyone's so caught up in the commotion, they'd never realize it was me.

"If you don't want to die, then could you at least stand up?" I said. "Even if you had a chance at dodging something, you lose that chance if you're sitting

on the ground.”

“Ah,” she gasped and tried to stand on her shaking legs, but she collapsed back to the ground. She tried again, though; this time, she somehow used her own strength to stand.

Tiegel and I could probably buy enough time for her to run, but, looking at her, I didn’t think she could manage to.

*Seriously. This is annoying.*

Is Evan all right? He wouldn’t get away unscathed if he were attacked by monsters the same as us. But...so what? Why do I have to worry about other people? It’s not like what happens to him matters to me.

Or Scarlanette, for that matter. She’s annoying, right? Then, I can just abandon her right now. Why do I have to be here, fighting to protect others? I’m not obligated to do that.

It’s a dog-eat-dog world, after all. It’s her fault if she dies.

“Arg! For the love of—! I’m really irritated!” I shouted.

The monster in front of me had its eye fixed solely on us. We wouldn’t even be able to escape until we defeated it.

*Right. That’s it.* It’s not like I’m going out of my way to defend her. I’ve always loved myself the most. I’m defeating the monsters for *me*. I happen to be saving Scarlanette in the process. That’s all.

I pulled the pin from my hair, which came tumbling down in a river. The pin of the decoration was sharp. A convenient weapon in times like these.

I could deal life-threatening injuries to a human with this, but the best I could do against a monster was destroy its eyes. But that was enough. It’s not like it was my only hidden weapon.

When the monster came at me, I slipped inside its reach, leapt high, and plunged the pin into its eye.

“Graaaaaaaaah!”

I successfully destroyed its remaining eye. It flailed its left arm like it was

going to cast off the pain, but it was easy enough to dodge random, blind swings like that. I picked up a sword that had fallen to the ground. There was also the body of a knight nearby, killed by a monster, but I didn't care about that.

There were several of them nearby anyway.

I raised the sword and swung it down when the monster's arm swiped towards me. The blade was exactly what I'd expect of a knight's sword. Its superb cutting ability lopped off the monster's arm with ease.

Having lost both arms, it also lost its ability to balance and tumbled backward. Once it fell to the ground, I removed its head.

With that, the enemy immediately in front of me was defeated. Next thing to do was to get as far away from here as I could. There would be no end to my opponents with numbers like these.

"Gaaah!"

"Selena!"

At nearly the exact same time, I heard a man's scream and Evan's voice, though he was supposed to be in the forest.

The man who screamed fell to the ground. The four-legged monster who killed him noticed me and rushed towards me at terrifying speed.

*I'm going to die here,* I thought dimly.

Tiegel shoved me and put himself in front of the monster. Now, he would die. A thought flitted across my mind that his death wasn't acceptable. At that moment, Evan slipped in between Tiegel and the monster. The monster's sharp fangs pierced into Evan's shoulder.

Considering the timing of when Tiegel pushed me aside and when Evan put himself in front of the monster, it seemed like both of them acted at the same time to try and protect me.

"...Why?" I asked.

*Why are you here? Why are you protecting me?*



My eyes barely focused as I looked at Evan on the ground, bleeding.

“Garg!”

Tiegel chopped off the four-legged monster’s head, killing it.

“Your Highness!” called a young man as he rushed over to Evan as he bled. Evan didn’t respond. His face looked paler every moment. He was going to die.

*I’m the one who should be dying. I’m supposed to die.*

“E-Evaaaaaan!”

*Who’s screaming? So annoying. Just shut up,* I thought, then I tasted blood. My throat hurt. I realized the blood came from my throat, raw and hoarse. That’s when I realized I was the one screaming.

*“I will go down with you, if need be, to protect him.”*

Those words from the knight who killed me crossed my mind.

Why am I remembering that at a time like this? I failed to kill the prince back then. I died, so I don’t know what happened to the prince afterward. Did he cry for the knight who’d died in his place? Or did he just lay him to rest like one of the other many shields that had fallen for him?

Did he become king? Or did a different assassin kill him in the end? Was that man really worthy of that knight’s life?

Had the knight died in vain?

I don’t know any of it. I died. Right. I see. If you die, you never find out.

But, Evan, there’s one thing I do know already.

I am not worthy of what you’ve done.

## Fourteen: Your End

I don't remember what happened after that. When I finally came back to my senses, I was standing there, frozen, covered in blood, and Tiegel had his arms around me.

Evan had sent for reinforcements, and those knights were cutting down the monsters one by one. I didn't see it but felt a knight come over to me. He seemed to be saying something, but none of the words made it into my head.

*I should have killed her.*

This happened because I let myself become trapped by the ridiculous morals of a noble lady. But a crime that goes unsolved is a crime not committed.

Yes. I will end her after this, and no one will ever know.

Then I won't make a clumsy mistake like this again.

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### **Side View: Hera**

I forgave the debt of a lower-ranking noble. Though, I had made that debt by pulling strings behind the scenes in the first place. In exchange for eliminating that debt, I gave his daughter a whistle and told her to blow it at the Festival of Hunting. It was a monster-calling whistle. Obviously, I didn't tell her that.

She did what I told her to do. She blew the whistle. Then, she died at the hands of the monsters that rushed over. I'd already eliminated her family when the festival began, so there was no proof to connect it back to me.

I was concerned about purchasing the whistle, but I used several go-betweens, making it impossible for anyone to know it was me. Even if someone from the underbelly of society did testify against me, it was their word against the word of the Royal Consort. It's obvious who people will believe. There's absolutely nothing to worry about.

Or so I thought.

So then, how?

“...Rick,” I said, chewing my nails. A bad habit that came out when I was irritated. I put so much work into making sure they stayed nice and neat, and now they’re a mess because of that girl.

*It’s all her fault.*

She’s the one who brought all this bad luck on me. Next time, I will kill her. I swear. And it will be an even nastier death. As I started planning how to kill her, the man responsible for the kingdom’s assassins appeared before me.

He came to kill me. He found out it was me who caused the chaos at the festival.

“You should’ve just behaved,” he said. “You could’ve led a perfectly smooth life as the royal consort if you had. Fancy dresses, beautiful jewels. You could’ve lived the rest of your greedy, filthy life surrounded by those things.”

“Urk.”

*Why is he here? No, it’s all right. I still have options.*

“Please, please forgive me,” I said.

Men crumble when women cry. Especially a woman as beautiful and alluring as me. I let out fat tears.

“I, I don’t want to die. Please, I’m begging you. Won’t you let me go, Rick?” I said and clung to him, pressing my breasts against him. That is where almost all men cave. He may lead the kingdom’s darker side, but he was still a man. It was easy to wrap him around my finger.

“You don’t want to die?” he said.

*See, it’s working.*

“No, I don’t, Rick,” I said.

*So easy.*

“If that’s the case, you’re sucking up to the wrong person,” he said.

“What?”

“I’m not the one who’s going to kill you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I have a very hardworking person who just really, really wants to kill you.”

He stepped away like he was rejecting me. In his place, a girl stepped forward. I didn’t understand. How did these two know each other?

The only thing I did understand was that this girl was cut from the same cloth as Rick.

“Selena Violette.”

Selena Violette slipped into my room in the middle of the night and came at me. She clutched my neck like she was going to kill me. That hand didn’t hesitate, not at all. It squeezed around my neck. At that moment, Selena looked like the assassins I’d hired in the past.

I don’t understand why a mere noble girl makes me think of those who dwell in the dark.

This is the person I was trying to kill. I could just about breathe still, but I couldn’t even scream in terror, even though every next moment might be my last.

“Evan was hurt because of you,” said Selena. “He’s not dead, but that monster’s fangs were poisonous. He still hasn’t woken.”

I couldn’t say anything.

“Don’t worry about it, though. It’s his fault if he dies. It just means he wasn’t strong enough to survive. That’s it. Humans live in the same world as wild animals. The strong consume the weak. That’s how it is, but then...why? Why am I so pissed off?”

*She’s insane.*

There was a gleam of madness in her eyes.

Not long ago, I’d sent assassins after her. Their heads had ended up in my room. At the time, I decided the Violettes must have hired people from the Dark Guild as their guards. But I know now that’s not the case. *She* killed those

assassins.

“Is it...because I like him?” she muttered. “Maybe. Yeah, I do like him. Quite a lot. Is that why? I can’t stand the thought of a measly insect like you touching him.”

And I had touched something I shouldn’t have.

She smiled. It was bewitching and bone-chilling.

“Well, insect, let me teach you a lesson,” she said, and her hand tightened around my neck until it snapped.





## Fifteen: A Toy I Like

**THE** King entered his office early in the morning to work, just like every day, but he found a stack of paperwork he hadn't seen before. He read it steadily. It was about the Royal Consort Hera and the people involved with her. It contained evidence showing how her family had embezzled funds and how she was involved with the monster attack at the Festival of Hunting. They were all things Rick had investigated.

Filled with rage at what he read, the King immediately called for the captain of the knights. When the captain arrived, the King slammed down that packet of papers Rick had delivered without anyone seeing.

"Arrest all of these traitors, immediately!" roared the King. "If they resist, use as much force as necessary. Particularly with the Royal Consort! Though, it would be better if they live to see trial."

"As you command, Your Majesty."

The captain immediately took a squad of knights to the Royal Consort's chambers. They were already too late. The Royal Consort was lying in her bed, dead. Her face was contorted in terror as if she'd seen a horrifying creature.

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**"THAT'S** what you get for underestimating me."

I was staying in the palace, an arrangement made by the King.

At Evan's bedside, I heard a flurry of people going back and forth. Someone must have discovered the Royal Consort's body.

She seemed to think everything would be fine if she killed everyone involved, but she'd purchased the monster-calling whistle from the black market. That was basically like going to Rick, the leader of the Dark Guild, and begging him to find her.

The people who work in the black market are used to being used as



disposable pawns, and that makes them wary. They always hold on to evidence so they can take anyone down with them if they're betrayed or blackmail those people into not betraying them in the first place.

And this is what happens when you get involved with those people without understanding that.

"I got rid of her, the nuisance, so why won't you open your eyes?" I asked Evan.

*"You can't understand. I have no regrets about giving my life to protect him. It's not because he is the prince. It's not because he is my master. It's not because I am a knight. So long as he is who he is, I give him everything I am."*

That's what the knight had said at the end, smiling as he died. I died shortly after that.

Humans are a mystery.

They love themselves more than anyone else. They prioritize themselves over anyone else. They're perfectly happy to beat down others if it means protecting themselves, and they'll even threaten someone else's life in the right or wrong situation. But then, there are people like that knight and Evan who fling themselves in front of danger for someone else, with no regard for their own life.

They could leave them, those other people. They could take care of themselves and no one else.

"Lady Selena, please have something to eat. You'll weaken yourself if you go any longer without eating," said Tiegel. I could see out of the corner of my eye that he looked concerned. "Something small, at least," he said. "Please."

*I'm not hungry.*

I might eat three meals a day now like it's perfectly normal, but I'd gone days without food or drink in my past life. It probably wasn't good for me, but it's not that big of a deal to go without food for a little while. It'd be worse for me to force myself to eat only to throw it back up.

"Shall I prepare you something good for digestion? Or perhaps a piece of

fruit? Would you be able to eat that?" said Tiegel. He seemed to really want me to eat something.

"Lady Selena," came a voice from nearby. I looked and saw the King. I must be really out of it if I didn't notice someone getting that close to me. "I appreciate how much you've been caring for my son, but you need to take care of yourself as well, or you may collapse," he said.

"I don't care about him... It's not caring..." I said.

I always put myself first. I couldn't care less about anything else. I'd always told myself it had nothing to do with me.

"Is that true?" he asked.

I couldn't answer.

My relationship with Evan was all business. We connected for nothing more than insurance to protect ourselves when Rosemary first became engaged to Heinrich. That's all our relationship was.

He, too, only wanted a relationship with me because it benefited him.

"I'm not worth it, him risking his life to protect me. We don't have that sort of relationship," I said. If that was the case, why was my heart such a mess?

"And yet, my son risked his life to protect you. He chose to do that, knowing he should prioritize himself. That implies you are very important to him."

"Then he's a fool," I said.

"Yes. An utter fool," replied the King.

"Could you not call someone a fool when they're sleeping?"

"Ah, Evan!" I cried.

He was awake. He tried to sit up but failed. Not surprising. He was heavily wounded when he was brought here. He'd lost so much blood he was unconscious for several days.

The King sent the maidservant accompanying him to fetch a healer and then told Evan to keep resting.

"Looks like I've overslept quite a lot if I made you look like that," said Evan.

Water was trickling out of my eyes.

I know what these are called. They're "tears." All the people I'd killed shed these drops of water. I never thought I would. The feelings welling up in me were so unfamiliar I couldn't calm myself, but it wasn't entirely unpleasant.

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**EVAN** was recovering steadily. The healers regularly checked up on him. While he was still not allowed to do any strenuous activity, they expected him to fully recover.

All of Hera's crimes were brought to light. Her body wasn't going to be interred in the royal crypt, and it was noted for future generations that she was a criminal. Her parents' family was dissolved, and it was discovered that her father had been accepting embezzled funds that she had slipped him. He was sentenced to death. Her mother's extravagant expenditures had made life difficult for the subjects of their domain, but there were no obvious crimes she committed. She escaped without any real punishment.

However, she wouldn't be able to maintain the same lifestyle she had before since she and her husband's family had been dissolved, forcing her to return to her original family.

Scarlanette and her parents approached me, apologized for her past behavior towards me, and thanked me for protecting her at the festival. Not that I was actually protecting her. I was just trying to eliminate the threat that stood before me. But Evan told me to accept their thanks, so I did. Scarlanette seemed happy for some reason I didn't understand.

"Looks like we'll never know who it was that killed the Royal Consort."

"Oh," I said. I was with Evan in the palace's courtyard.

He wasn't allowed to do strenuous activity but also didn't like the idea of his body weakening, so he recently added a stroll through the gardens into his daily routine. He, for some reason, insisted I accompany him when he did. Apparently, it was boring to do it alone.

"It's because it's a scandal for the royal family," he said. "We're not planning on investigating it any further. And the investigation that was done was

essentially for show. They were never going to discover who it was because no one really tried.”

“I see.”

“You couldn’t let it go, could you?” he said.

I didn’t say anything. He stopped walking, and my feet stopped moving in response. He looked me straight in the eyes and touched my cheek. His hand was rough and heavy, a hand that holds a sword. His face came nearer, and his lips gently touched mine.

“You didn’t dodge,” he said.

“I couldn’t let it go. I couldn’t bear how angry I was,” I said.

“No?”

“Evan. It seems I like you.”

Yes. I like him. It’s not because he’s important to me or anything, but he smiled happily for some reason.

Ugh, that’s weird. What the hell is that?

“Selena, I like you too,” he said.

“You’re like a favored toy,” I said.

“Uh...”

“I’ve been thinking about it for a while, about why I was so angry when you were hurt.”

“Selena, you mean, how you feel about me—”

“I once saw a child who’d had their toy taken away. I think what I felt was something like that.”

The child had been very angry. They’d cried. I think what I felt was similar.

I mean, it’s not like I could possibly prioritize anyone else over myself. I don’t even understand why I like Evan. I probably find him intriguing because he’s so different from any royal I’ve ever seen.

Or maybe it’s because he reminds me of that knight I killed at the end of my

previous life.

Either way, I like Evan. But just because I like him doesn't mean he's important to me.

"I am curious to hear how you came to that conclusion," said Evan.

"Like I said, I saw that child who cried when someone took their toy away. I asked Tiegel about it, and he said it was the same reason why I was angry when the Royal Consort hurt you. I asked him to explain it in detail, and, yes, it made enough sense that I'm certain that's the right explanation."

"That bastard! He did it on purpose," muttered Evan, though I didn't really hear what he said.

"Anyway! That's why I don't want you ever to do something dangerous like that again," I said. "You wouldn't like it if a toy you like was broken, would you? I just want you to understand how that feels."

"...I understand."

"Evan?" He looked incredibly disappointed for some reason. "You promise you won't do that again, right?" I said, smiling, pushing the issue to make sure, but his expression was bitter. Why?

"I don't want you doing something dangerous like that, either," he said. "My heart nearly stopped when I saw you standing against those monsters."

"I'll do my best."

Evan let out a long sigh but didn't say anything immediately. The sigh was so long that I wondered if he might use up his entire life's quota of sighs in one go. "It's very like you to not just say 'yes' to that," he said finally.

"You look a little tired. Perhaps you should go back to your room," I suggested. "It's not good for you to push yourself too much on these walks."

"It's your fault."

*That's a weird thing to say.* I'm only coming with him on these walks because he told me to. I didn't force him to bring me along. And now he's putting me in an uncomfortable situation by blaming me.

“It’s not my body that’s tired,” he said. “I was just reminded I have a lot of work left to do.”

“Hm?”

What exactly does he have to work hard at? His grades at the academy are excellent, and he makes a good leader. Is there something he needs to work harder at because he’s the crown prince?

“I’m not entirely sure what you mean, but I do owe you for saving me,” I said. “I’ll help if I can.”

When I said that, he bent over double, clutching at his sides as he laughed out loud. I really don’t understand what’s so funny. I don’t get it, but, well, so long as he’s enjoying himself.

## Epilogue

**“YOU,** servant boy.”

Evan’s recovery was going well, and the healers said he was free to return to his normal life. He came to visit right after that. For some reason, the moment he arrived, he went straight for Tiegel.

It surprised me because I’d never seen him act like that. He grabbed Tiegel’s shoulders and whispered in his ear, “What ridiculous nonsense have you been spouting to your mistress?”

“Whatever do you mean?” asked Tiegel.

“Don’t play dumb. You know what I mean.”

“Hm, I’m not entirely sure. I simply gave Lady Selena advice when she needed it. Is there something wrong with that? I thought she came to accept her feelings of ‘liking.’”

*Oh my god. He smiled. Tiegel never smiles. What in the world are they talking about?*

“So, I’m supposed to say, ‘Oh, thank you, you’ve made me the beloved toy?’” said Evan. “You knew what you were doing when you said that. You really are a piece of work. I just never realized it because you’re always silently hanging around.”

Tiegel’s actual expression was the same as always, a slight upturn at the corners of his mouth. But, right now, he was smiling with his entire body as if trying to say he was truly enjoying every moment of this. I’d never seen him like that.

*What are they talking about? I can’t hear, and I have no intention of asking. There’s just something about this situation I kind of, no, I really don’t like.*

“It’s part of an attendant’s duties to protect his mistress from insects,” said

Tiegel.

“I’m an insect?” said Evan.

“I’m glad you’re aware.”

“You know, I am the crown prince. The next king. You understand that, right?”

“I am aware.”

“Hey, you two. What are you talking about?” I intervened.

They both turned to look at me. Evan said, “Nothing,” and Tiegel said, “A trivial matter. Nothing you need to worry yourself about.”

*A secret between boys? Hm. My pet and my toy have a secret they’re not letting me in on?*

“Well...” I said. “I’m just happy you’re getting along.”

“We are not,” they said in unison.

*They’re harmonizing.*

*I do not like being left out. So, how do I get it out of them?*



# Side Story 1: Beloved Bruce's Duty

## Side View: Bruce

**MY** name is Bruce. My owner is Rosemary. She's nice and always smiling.

One day, I was going for a walk with Rosemary, like always, and smelled something really good. It smelled so yummy. I didn't even think. I left Rosemary behind and went for the smell. I had to.

"Ah, wait!" called Rosemary, but I still didn't listen. I was so hungry. I couldn't stop myself.

I got into this giant garden with all these flowers and that's where I saw it: a monster. A black-haired monster. My instincts told me, "This thing is dangerous. It's an enemy. You have to get rid of it."

So, I did what my instincts said and tried to get rid of the dangerous monster, but it stabbed me with a knife. I was trying to deal with the pain and looked up at it. It looked down at me, no emotion in its eyes, as cold as ice.

I learned later that the monster was the daughter of the people who lived in the mansion I barged into. And my owner—she's so important to me—seemed really happy when she told me she was going to be the monster's sister.

The monster's sister? She'll just stab Rosemary like she stabbed me.

I'm the only one who can protect her.

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**"OH,** Bruce. You're up already?"

The lady patted me on the head as she passed by. Everyone in the mansion was so happy when they pet me. It made me happy, too. I loved everyone in the mansion. Everyone here is a normal person except the monster. They're all nice. They all pat my head and say, "How cute." And they give me nice food.

This place is filled with kindness. It's so friendly. That's why the monster came

to live here. It's not just Rosemary I have to protect; it's everyone. Everyone in the mansion.

From that day on, I kept watch on the monster. She doesn't really leave her room. She seems different sometimes. It's really, really rare. Just sometimes.

The monster is just scary, that's all. But sometimes, she seems more like an emotionless doll. Normally, when I look at the monster, the monster ignores me even if she knows I'm there. But when she's the doll, she stares at me. Like, just the inside of the monster was swapped out for a different person.

Like right now. The monster's in her room, and I'm staring at her through the window, and she—the doll one—is staring right back at me.

“.....”

“.....”

The monster isn't scary when she's the doll. It's probably okay. And I'm busy. Guess I don't have to worry about keeping an eye on the monster today.

“Huff, huff, huff.” I started humming and went for a walk in the garden.

The weather's nice today, and I don't have to keep watch on the monster. What should I do? Oh, a butterfly! I'll chase it. I wonder where it'll fly to.

This is fun! Everything's been so good ever since I came here. I'm never hungry, I don't have to stay out in the rain, and I'm not cold.

This is my first time being able to take it easy and chase around the butterflies. I'm really lucky I met Rosemary and that we came to this mansion.

“Hey! You dumb mutt! Stay out of the garden, you mangy beast!”

I whined.

I got so caught up in chasing the butterfly that I didn't even realize I went near the gardener man. The women who work in the house always tell me not to go near him because he hates dogs.

Now he's throwing rocks at me!

It's not the first time people have thrown rocks at me. Sometimes, I'd just be walking around, and my just being there made them angry for some reason.

They'd chase me around, throwing rocks at me.

I wasn't doing anything; I was just there. When did humans take over everything in the world?

"And the same goes for that commoner girl," huffed the gardener man. "She's a commoner just like me, but the mistress takes her in just cause she's a kid. Now she's wearing these dresses that don't suit her. Who does she think she is?" The gardener man scowled at me. "Hey, why are you looking at me like that? You're just a dog."

I bared my teeth and glared back at him. The gardener man didn't seem to like that.

Humans don't make any sense to us animals. They randomly treat us like they love us, then randomly abandon us, and randomly act mean to us for no reason.

Whenever an animal like me bares its teeth to a human, we have a reason. We have our own rules. All things that live in this world live by their own rules.

Only humans try to force their rules on other things, making us try to understand. They say that's how we learn to live with each other. They don't even try to accept other animals' rules and still look down on us like we're not smart or don't understand reason. Live together? Hah.

I hate humans—not all humans, though. I love the humans in this mansion. I love Rosemary. I know how it is; it's the same with us: Some are good, some are bad.

"What are you doing?" came a voice.

"Urgh!" I jumped, and not because the gardener man was swinging those big scissors he used to cut branches at me.

I jumped because the monster was back. It appeared there, between me and the gardener. She grabbed the blades of the big scissors with her bare hand like she was protecting me.

When I saw her in her room, she was just the doll. Now she's back to being the monster. She's scary. My instincts still warn me she's dangerous, but I can't let them take over my body like when we first met and I tried to take her out.

I'm still trying to figure things out. Is the monster my enemy? Or is she maybe a friend?

The monster looked at me, then at the gardener man.

"L-Lady Selena! This dumb mutt's been causing trouble."

*No! I didn't do anything. You're the one who started throwing rocks at me. I didn't do anything wrong.*

"Dumb mutt?" said the monster. "Do you mean Bruce?"

"Y-Yes, my lady."

"Hmph. Dumb mutt..."

"M-My lady? Is something wrong?"

"I'm always thinking about how so many people in this mansion don't actually understand what they are. You're one of them."

The air felt cold.

The hostile aura the monster let off was going towards the gardener man, and I was behind her, but every one of my hairs still stood on end, and I started shaking. I thought I was going to die.

"Bruce is not just a dog," said the monster. "He is a dog owned by the Violette family. Do you understand what that means, Jacob?"

The monster smiled. The gardener man crumpled to the ground, and the monster lifted his chin, holding him in place so he couldn't look away.

"Are you, are you saying I'm lower than an *animal*?!" he rasped. His face was bright red, and he was shaking.

"Of course you are."

It looked like the monster was intentionally insulting him. Or I didn't understand what was happening, and that's the only way the monster knows how to interact with people.

Her eyes were empty. She smiled, but it was just a smile where she curved her lips up.

“Bruce is a pet of the Violette family, making him a member of our family,” she said. “But he is still just an animal. If he were to endanger any of the family, he would be euthanized. There is a priority amongst living things, after all. That priority puts human members of the duke’s family first, followed by animals owned by the family. Horses and dogs are considered part of the family’s assets the moment we own them.”

The monster then placed a finger on the gardener man’s chest and said, “*You* are a servant. You are not a member of the Violette family. Know your place.”

“Erk. My apologies, my lady,” he said. He hung his head apologetically, or at least it looked like that at first glance, but the sparkle in his eyes didn’t match his words.

Humans always say stuff that doesn’t match what they’re thinking. But they’re still really dumb. They make all these schemes and try to trick other people, so why don’t they ever think the other person is also making schemes and trying to trick them? I don’t get it.

Animals like me always do exactly what our hearts tell us to. Only humans lie to others about what’s inside.

“No need to apologize,” said the monster.

“Huh?”

“You’re removed from service. We’ll pay your wages up to today. I’ll explain the situation to my mother. Pack your things and leave.”

But humans’ lies don’t work on the monster.

The gardener man looked at the monster, his mouth flapping open and closed. I guess he never thought he’d be thrown out just because he threatened me. I’m surprised, too.

It’s not like the monster needs to worry about me.

“You can’t possibly continue to work here after you’ve threatened a living creature of the duke’s family,” said the monster. “There’s no guarantee you won’t next threaten my mother or Rosemary like you did Bruce. And since there is no guarantee, it’s best to let you go. ‘When in doubt, punish,’ as they say.”

“Ah, p-please forgive me! I don’t have anywhere to go if you kick me out!”

“Oh. Well, then, go die on the streets.”

“Y-You can’t be... P-Please! I’m begging you, please!” The gardener man sunk down, repeating the same thing over and over.

“You should have thought more about how you lived if this is such a problem. I would have let this go if you had honestly meant that first apology, as no actual harm was done. But you were thinking something else. You may have had an apology on your lips, but in your heart, you were thinking about how you would get revenge for this humiliation. Didn’t I tell you, Jacob, to know your place? Tiegel, remove him from the property.”

“Yes, my lady.”

The monster’s attendant dragged the gardener man off, and then, the monster left without even looking at me. It looked like she’d already forgotten about me.

I followed behind her. She looked at me only once but seemed to lose interest right away. She just looked forward again and kept on walking.

The monster always has a blank expression and a scary aura around her. She doesn’t pat me or talk to me like the other people in the mansion. She’s completely different from all of them. Which makes sense. She’s not a human, after all. She’s a monster.

But sometimes, she seems softer. It’s when she talks to her attendant, the person named Tiegel. Those times, she...smiles.

The monster is scary, and I don’t really want to interact with her, but I figured out she’s the same as us animals. She doesn’t attack unless she has a reason. I was the one who just got all scared and attacked her the first time, so she attacked me.

Maybe...I’ll give her a thank-you present for today. And an apology. To say I’m sorry for trying to bite her that one day.

She obviously can’t understand what I say, so maybe I’ll give her some of my food.

But my duty is to protect Rosemary and all these people in the mansion I love, so I guess I should still keep watch on the monster. I still can't trust the monster completely.

You know, though, if I happen to see her in trouble while I'm doing that, I might as well just help, I guess.

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**"LADY** Selena, what is this bone?" asked Tiegel.

"A thank you and proof of an improved relationship," I said.

Tiegel looked at me questioningly.

I know Bruce is always watching me, but that look has changed recently. Not that he had to care about what happened. He seems honest despite being an animal.

Actually, maybe being an animal is exactly why he is honest.

## Side Story 2: She Jests at Scars That Never Felt a Wound

### Side View: Marin the Maidservant

**“AGH.”**

Pain shot up my back.

This pain is my punishment for attacking others. For mistaking who the mistress I should be serving is.

Countless scars from the whip covered my back. They would never disappear. I have to bear these for the rest of my life, as I should.

Selena Violette: a person so terrifying it's impossible to believe she is the daughter of her kind, cheerful, always smiling mother. She is also my mistress now.

She is definitely different.

“Did you hear what Lady Selena did?”

“Oh my lord, yes, I did. You're talking about how she used a cake knife to stab that poor dog that wandered in, right?”

“I can't believe she'd do something like that.”

“I know. It's scary.”

Some of my coworkers had gossiped in the hallway. They'd be reprimanded for that in any other home, but here, the mistress simply says, “Servants are humans too; they're going to chat.” So we never get reprimanded. Rumors, good and bad, fly thick through these halls, more so than anywhere else.

I did as Lady Rosemary ordered me to and assisted her in insulting Lady Selena. I was whipped as punishment, and afterward, I became Lady Selena's personal maidservant. It took no time for that information to spread across the mansion, from the servants in the cellars up to the butlers on the highest level.

“Marin, are you all right? Your back must hurt. You should take a little rest,”



said one of my coworkers. Thankfully, many of them sympathized with my situation, meaning I wasn't uncomfortable continuing to work here.

"I'm fine," I said.

"Lady Selena really is terrifying. And it's all her fault for how she always acts."

*You're wrong*, I thought, then said, "I was lucky. Any other house and I could have been on the chopping block."

That could have been metaphorical in terms of losing my job, but it also could have been literal.

"Wh-What are you saying, Marin?" said another coworker.

"I mean it," I said. "This is nothing."

Their expressions stiffened, and they tried to disagree with me. I felt like I was looking at the old me and couldn't help smiling with pity at myself.

I had become numb.

No matter what we did, we were forgiven. I assumed that was just the way things were. The people here don't understand who the master is and who the servants are.

A lenient master is not always a good thing.

"Do you really think you'd be able to do the same sort of thing to any other noble?" I asked.

"Well..."

That shut their mouths. "If you can't treat any other nobles like that, why do you think we can treat our masters like that?"

No one answered. Nobody had the answer.

They believed their standing, the environment they'd been placed in, was made of solid bedrock, unshakable no matter what happened. That continued unchanged for a long time, but it won't for any longer.

For better or worse, the Violettes had an explosive inside their home. We don't yet know whether it will benefit us or not when it explodes.

“You should all really think things through and decide who you should align yourselves with,” I said.

Their choice was between an arrogant former commoner who was happy to cast aside us servants at a moment’s notice or a terrifying noble girl who couldn’t care less about how our lives fell. We had to determine who would keep us from having to crawl through hell. A wrong decision would not be forgiven. One wrong step, and we would find ourselves tumbling into the abyss. I know I have no future.

“Marin seems a little weird in the head these days,” said one of my coworkers as I walked away.

“Of course she is. She’s Lady Selena’s personal maidservant now. That means she’s going to be tortured from here on out,” said another.

I warned them as a friend. The rest is up to them. I’m not going to get involved with whatever happens.

+++

“**MARIN**, make me a cup of tea.”

“Yes, my lady.”

Once I started interacting with her, I saw that Lady Selena wasn’t nearly as frightening as the rumors made her out to be. There were times she scared me, of course, but that was only when there was some threat to her. It was like how animals use their self-preservation instincts. Though, it may be rude to make such a comparison to a noble lady. But really...

Tiegel shot me a look that said, “What is it?” I responded with a smile that said, “Nothing,” and focused on preparing the tea.

I was more frightened of the mysterious young man, Tiegel, than my lady. He seemed to be a former slave the lady picked up somewhere. It felt like he was always walking around with a blade drawn. Metaphorically, of course. He didn’t actually carry a drawn blade all the time.

The other maids thought he was amazing. They had the luxury of saying, “The burn scars are unfortunate, but he’s still gorgeous even with them.” Yes, he was

attractive, but I had no desire to become closer to him.

“Marin, have you learned anything interesting?” asked Lady Selena.

“I discovered Lady Rosemary will be hosting a tea party. What would you like to do?” I asked.

“I won’t do anything.”

“Nothing, my lady?”

“No.”

While the Violette family had adopted Rosemary, Lady Selena was the true daughter of the house. Any normal noble girl would be angry if Rosemary tried to push her aside and take her place by hosting a tea party in the mansion.

I was certain they would all think things like, “What does she think she’s doing?”, “Impudent commoner,” or even, “She thinks she’s a noble now,” but I never got the impression Lady Selena thought those sorts of things. She seemed not to care at all. So long as they didn’t turn their weapons on her, she seemed to think as much of other people as she did of stones by the side of the road.

Even with that, I think she’s a good mistress because she doesn’t demand that I do anything unreasonable.

If it had been Lady Selena who had given me that order, not Lady Rosemary, would Lady Selena have abandoned me in the same way? There’s no point in thinking about it, is there? I have a vague feeling Lady Selena would never tell me to do something like that in the first place. She doesn’t care enough about others. I also don’t think she sees others as necessary, even me.

No, I should stop all this unnecessary ruminating. I’m nothing more than a maidservant. It’s not my place to try and understand everything about my mistress.

“Excuse me,” I said. I cleaned up the tea tray after Lady Selena finished and exited the room.

†††

“**OH**, look. The traitor.”

It wasn't always just understanding coworkers in the hallways.

"What a horrible person, trying to blame Lady Rosemary for what she did."

"Poor Lady Rosemary."

Rosemary's maidservants said horrible things about me, loud enough so I could hear, hid things from me, or generally interfered with my work. I didn't know if they did it to curry favor with her or if they honestly felt that way. They were like children.

"It boils my blood how she walks around like she did nothing wrong."

"The nerve."

"She should just resign right now."

Harassing me was like a pastime for these women who didn't think the misfortune that befell me could befall them as well.

There is a quote by one famous playwright: "He jests at scars that never felt a wound."

Truer words have never been spoken.

They look at me and laugh. They call me a fool. But, once they stop laughing, they'll come crawling. I know because I used to be where they are now.

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"I was just following Lady Rosemary's orders!"

"Don't lie! You did that all on your own. I don't know anything about it."

"But! Lady Rosemary, how could you?"

"You decided to do it, and now you're trying to blame it on me because you messed up? It's because you don't like me because I used to be a commoner!"

"That's not true! I just—"

"I don't want to hear it. Everyone hates me. Everyone thinks they can do whatever they want to me because I used to be a commoner."

One by one, Lady Rosemary's maids and servants were punished for attempting to harm Lady Selena. Their numbers dwindled since some were

removed from service.

In the beginning, the other servants thought the maids were doing these things on their own, though even they started to think it odd when it kept happening.

The problem was that the person in charge of our employment was the sheltered, air-headed wife of the duke. She liked Lady Rosemary, so we servants were at risk of losing our jobs if we insulted her.

The reverse of that meant that anyone who earned Lady Rosemary's favor could gain great status in the home and get away with almost anything. That meant many servants still attended to Lady Rosemary, trying to drag each other down to get Lady Rosemary to like them the best.

They neglected their duties as they set traps for their competition. And they call themselves the servants of a duke? Any other house would immediately send them to pack their bags.

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**"MARIN,** make me a cup of tea."

"Yes, Lady Selena."

Compared to that, working for Lady Selena is peaceful. She values the quality of my work and effort and never looks at things with a bias. The only place in the Violette home where one can focus entirely on one's duties as a maidservant is under Lady Selena.

That's why I'm glad I came to work as her dedicated maidservant. I put myself to work, feeling grateful toward her.

# Extra Story: My Name Is Student A

## Side View: Student A

**BEAUTIFUL**, lustrous black hair. Eyes so blue they seemed to be a reflection of the sky itself. Oh, Lady Selena Violette. It doesn't matter who looks upon your beautiful countenance, man or woman; you capture everyone's eyes with your beauty simply by walking by.

I know you notice our gazes, but perhaps you're used to it because you don't react.

Personally, I think that's absurdly cool.

How does someone get that cool?

"Selena."

"Good morning, Your Highness."

Special people are born special; only special people can gather around them. That's why someone as average as me with no redeeming qualities, a mere member of the masses, can only look at you from afar like this.

I'm just the son of a baron. You and I are of different stations. We're different beings entirely. We live in different worlds, interacting with different environments. We have nothing in common.

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## **BAM!**

Something struck my back hard, and I couldn't breathe for a second because of the pain. My groans of pain didn't stop them. Another fist hit my face. Another hit my stomach. I couldn't endure it. I fell to the ground as four shadows loomed over me, guffawing.

"Aw, come on. Don't get worn out just from that. We're only getting started," said one.

“This punching bag’s no good,” said another.

The four boys having fun attacking me were all sons of counts, and all had bad reputations. My bad luck began when I ended up in the same class as them.

They’d first targeted my childhood friend. He was the son of a viscount, but his father was a step away from losing his title and had less money than mine, despite my father only being a baron. My friend only managed to attend the academy once his father borrowed money from his extended family.

My friend was a suitable target for these thugs who groveled at anyone of higher rank and acted aggressively toward anyone of lower rank.

“Stop,” my friend had begged, crying, hoping they’d let him go. They laughed and kicked him in the gut.

At first, I acted like I didn’t see it, but it hurt so much that I couldn’t stand it any longer.

Before I could stop myself, I stepped in to put an end to their violence. The son of a baron should never stand against sons of counts like that. I’m not special, either. It’s idiotic for a normal person to act like some knight in shining armor.

“Come on, you give it a go,” one said.

“B-But, I...” said my friend.

“What? Are you really refusing to do what we tell you? Are you serious?”

“Maybe he’ll finally learn his place if we have some more fun with him.”

“Eep!”

“Sounds good. Hey, you want us to have fun with you?”

“N-No!”

“Then do what we say.”

“...All right.”

Now, my friend was the minion of the thugs. Sometimes, he even joined in when they ordered him to. He’d apologized to me as he dumped a bucket of foul-smelling liquid on me.

The four sons of counts ordered him to do it, but they still insulted him for it, saying things like, “Woah, man, he really did it,” or, “Damn, you’re terrible,” and then they’d guffaw as if something about this was fun.

The whole time, my friend cried, apologizing over and over.

That’s normal for a normal person like me. I can’t do anything. I’m just a toy for the strong until they tire of me and toss me aside.

“You’re in my way,” came a voice one day.

“What the hell...?” said one of the four thugs.

“Ack!” gasped another.

Lady Selena Violette. For some reason, she was in the otherwise empty back garden of the academy. Their mob was blocking her route while they were attacking me.

“L-Lady Selena Violette,” said one.

They were only the sons of viscounts. There’s a significant difference in rank between a viscount and a duke. That’s why they all flinched when she appeared out of nowhere, but it only lasted a second. One of the four quickly pulled himself together and urged the others on.

Essentially, they thought this: her father is a duke, but in name only. His title is like a decoration; he has no actual influence in the noble social sphere. We don’t have to back down from her.

They had all seen her engaged in friendly conversation with Prince Evan, but they conveniently forgot that fact.

“Do you think you could keep this little incident a secret?” said one of the four. “We’re just having some fun. We wouldn’t want this to get blown out of proportion, and people get the wrong idea.”

“Yeah, exactly,” said another. “We’re not like a lady who can take it easy like yourself. We’re all poor second or third or worse sons with no chance of inheriting our fathers’ titles. If you get some confused sense of justice in your pretty little head and go telling on us, most of it would be a misunderstanding, and we’d get in trouble.”



“Don’t destroy our futures, my lady.”

“Or, you could come join us and— Gah!”

One of the chatty four went flying to the side when Lady Violette’s fist struck his face.

“I said, you’re in my way. Did you not hear me?” she said.

“Hey, bitch, don’t think you can get away with that just because you’re a girl.”

Angry that a girl felled one of their buddies, they forgot they were a lower rank than her and attacked her.

A noble lady, someone not used to fighting, would normally freeze out of sheer terror in a situation like this, but she didn’t seem fazed. Actually, she slipped past their attacks as easily as she might step around an object in her path. One powerful punch failed to land anywhere. The person who threw it stumbled forward, and she grabbed the nape of his neck just as he was about to fall and jerked him backward.

“Agh!”

He went backward with as much speed as he’d gone forward and crashed to his rear end with enough force to break his tailbone.

How is the daughter of a duke this experienced in combat? Before I even realized it, she’d defeated them all.

“Even puppies can measure the difference in strength between them and their opponent,” she said. “If they know they can’t take someone, they’ll wag their tail and try to endear themselves to the stronger animal. You can’t even do that, which means you’re lower than puppies.”

“Um, e-excuse me...” I said without thinking as she went to leave, even though I was not someone who should address her.

She seemed to notice me for the first time when I said something. Not surprising. Someone special like her would never see someone like me.

“Uh, I, um, thank you...for helping me,” I said. “You saved me.”

“I just got rid of something in my way,” she said as if to say she wasn’t helping

me. The characters in books used that sort of line to hide their embarrassment. I thought that might be the case with her, too, but I quickly realized I was wrong when I saw how she wasn't even really seeing me. That was a shock because I admired her so much.

"Ah. Right. Um, but you still did help. So, thank you," I said.

That's how it should be, anyway. It's not like anyone in this world would help me specifically. Definitely not someone as special as her.

"Y-You're really strong. I was surprised a noble lady like you could fight like that. I always knew special people were different," I said.

"Special people?" She looked back at me for the first time, her hair so black it seemed cloaked in darkness and her eyes so blue they reflected the spring sky. Her beauty put me on edge just by being in front of me, but now...those eyes *saw* me. I thought my heart might stop.

"Do you think you're ordinary?" she asked.

"Well, yeah. No matter what you look at, I'm ordinary. People like me are treated like nameless side characters in a play. I'm sure the daughter of a duke wouldn't understand what that's like. Oh, I didn't mean to say that. I'm sorry. It's not like saying it will do anything, anyway."

"I see. I agree. You will never be special."

I fell silent. I knew that, but she didn't have to say it so bluntly. We've only just met, after all.

"And it is true that, in this world, I am something unique."

*"In this world"? What does that mean?*

"And it is also true that I was born into a duke's household, a position considered blessed by the commonfolk. That means I was given a higher quality of education than others, I own expensive things, and I never have to go hungry."

*She's being really frank about her privilege. Usually, the higher their rank, the more they like to twist their words to hide that fact.*

"However, I am still just a human."

“Huh?”

“The terms ‘special’ or ‘ordinary’ are used by others towards an individual. They are not words used to describe ourselves. And yet, you’ve set yourself in the ‘ordinary’ frame. So long as you’ve given up on escaping that ordinary frame, you will be ordinary the rest of your life.”

“Ah.”

“It doesn’t matter how blessed an environment you’re in; if you don’t know how to use the treasures you have, they will go to waste.”

She was saying I shouldn’t decide I was ordinary based on things like my birth and upbringing. That would mean even I might be hiding the potential to be special like her someday, right?

“You’re weak,” she said. “So weak you can’t handle this rabble on your own.”

Someone with training is one thing, but I live a normal life. There’s no way I could handle them. She’s the extraordinary one for being able to handle them with ease. She doesn’t seem to realize that. Maybe she’s just a little out of step with everyone else? I wasn’t expecting that.

“What do you think will happen if you step into a contest of strength when you don’t have the strength to win? That’s why they treat you as their punching bag.”

I wasn’t trying to fight back with strength! I know it’ll be over quicker if I don’t resist, so I grit my teeth and bear it. But she seems to think I lost after trying to fight violence with violence. I don’t see how the situation she found me in could lead her to that misconception.

Why does it seem like everything’s about fighting with her even though she’s the daughter of a duke?

I’d assumed, based on her appearance and rank, that she was some elegant lady. Now that I’m talking to her, I realize I was wrong. But...

“Use your head,” she said. “You’re not an animal. If you can’t win on your own, get more people involved. But people won’t help if they don’t get anything out of it. You need to either incentivize them to help or find evidence

that will drive them into a corner. That should be easy for someone strong-willed enough to take their punches.”

*But...*

“The weak have their own way of fighting and winning. The weak can’t be picky with their methods. It’s not underhanded in the slightest. If they insult you, say you took the coward’s way out, just remind them they lost.”

And then she grinned and left.

She is so cool.

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“I think... You’re special to me,” said my friend, bowing over and over to me, crying fat tears. He’d watched my exchange with her from a distance. “You saved me back then. I was so happy you would do that. You seemed so cool, like a hero. And yet, you had to... I’m sorry. I was still afraid of being bullied. I did horrible things to you. I’m so sorry. I’m weak.”

*“So long as you’ve given up on escaping that ordinary frame, you truly will be ordinary the rest of your life.”*

I’d always thought I was ordinary. Boring. I seemed like one of those nameless side characters. But even I could save someone who would call me special.

She was right. I’d just labeled myself “ordinary” and given up.

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**AFTER** that, there were some minor rumors about Lady Selena at the academy.

“I heard she saved a lower-ranking noble boy who was being bullied.”

“She’s not just beautiful; she’s kind and strong! She’s so incredible.”

“I wish I could call her my sister.”

A fan club for her came together in the academy, and its membership grew steadily. She was always so blind to things about herself that she seemed oblivious to the club’s popularity.

Oh, and my friend and I? We joined the club.

## Afterword

**THANK** you for picking up a copy of *The Former Assassin Who Got Reincarnated as a Noble Girl*.

I first posted this book online, but partway through, I was having a hard time deciding how the plot would unfold, and I wasn't sure about the actions of my main character, Selena. I decided to put down my pen on this one.

But several readers of *Former Assassin* told me they really wanted to read more, so I reworked Selena's character and started writing again. I tossed out most of what I had written before and changed a lot of it. I put in the daisy-headed characters that I originally had no intention of putting in, integrated a lot of other things, and then thought I'd made it too big of a mishmash.

I never imagined *Former Assassin* would hit first in the rankings and get turned into a fully published novel. I was shocked, considering I dropped this work at one point.

So, thank you. This is all because of you, the readers.

Unlike my past works, I didn't lean too hard on the romance in this one. I can't say I didn't consider having Selena become engaged to someone like Tiegel or Evan, but I still couldn't imagine her loving someone just yet. I got stuck where you could just start to feel something growing.

Personally, I think Tiegel is more my type, but I haven't decided who Selena would choose to engage and marry.

I didn't touch much on the romance between side characters either, but I do have it in my mind that Rick and Sia are a couple.

I am quite attached to my characters in this story. I spent a lot of time and effort on this book, after all, so I was incredibly excited every time I received the illustrations for the cover, opening images, and the illustrations throughout. Selena wasn't quite how I imagined her; she came out even more incredible. I really like the pictures. They're exactly my sort of thing. So, thank you, MiRea,

for the amazing illustrations.

While the setting is fantasy, the cover illustration has a dark tone to it, and I think the difference between cover and content is one of this book's charms. I hope you enjoyed reading it to the end.

Lastly, I want to thank my editor and everyone involved in making this book. I hope we meet again.

July 2022, Satsuki Otonashi





**Rising from Ashes: My Dear Emperor, You're Putty in My Hands!**

By Makino Maebaru Illustration by Yoko Maturika

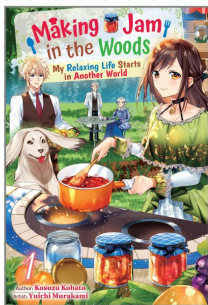
When Sai reincarnates into an otome game as an NPC destined to die, she's saved by the winged Orient Emperor who shares a similar fate! How'll they rewrite their story?



**I Guess This Dragon Who Lost Her Egg to Disaster Is My Mom Now**

By Suzume Kirisaki Illustration by Cosmic

A gender bender fantasy series about a betrayed adventurer who ends up not only turning into a girl, but being raised by a powerful dragon too!



**Making Jam in the Woods: My Relaxing Life Starts in Another World**

By Kosuzu Kobato Illustration by Yuichi Murakami

What Awaits Her In Another World Is Delicious Food And A Relaxing Life Surrounded By Spirits!

Margaret's life is cut short when she gets into a fatal accident at her workplace, except instead of the afterlife, she finds herself in another world!



Author: Iota AIUE Artist: Misa Sazanami



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