

Chapter 111 - Veritas

Sailing through the air toward Miss K's office, I barely had time to twist mid-flight, limbs flailing as I desperately tried to not crash into the floor like a complete idiot.

By some miracle—or maybe just sheer survival instinct—I managed to plant my feet, though the force behind the throw made me question whether Miss K was even human. My landing was far from graceful, shaky and disoriented, but at least I didn't eat shit outright.

I stumbled forward, momentum still carrying me, barely managing to catch myself before I could tumble face-first into the damn floor. But just as I was about to recover—

Shove.

A firm push from behind sent me lurching straight into the office, no time to react before—

BANG.

The door slammed shut behind me with an almost ominous finality.

Before I could even think about regaining my bearings, a vise-like grip locked onto the back of my neck. A sharp jolt ran through me as I was *dragged* toward the chair in front of Miss K's desk, my body moving entirely at her discretion.

I barely had time to process what the hell was happening before I was *made* to sit down, practically shoved and planted into the chair in front of Miss K's desk.

Only then did she finally let go.

I barely had a second to breathe before she leaned in close, voice low and *dangerously* sharp against my ear.

"What the *actual fuck* do you think you're doing, Miss Vildea?"

I swallowed hard, my mind still scrambling to *catch up*.

The last few seconds had been so thoroughly disorienting that my brain was still buffering, '*What the hell just happened...?*'

One second, I'd been taking down Kenzie, my fist mid-swing—then suddenly, I was on the ground, and now I was *here*, with a very real, very *pissed-off* Miss K literally breathing down my neck.

And just in case there was *any* doubt about how bad this was, she'd gone full "*Miss Vildea*" on me. Not *Sera*. Not even her usual teasing condescension.

No, she had hit me with the full *bureaucratic name* treatment.

That was never a good sign.

“Ehh... I... I’m not sure...” I muttered, stalling for time, my voice coming out way weaker than I’d have liked.

I needed a second to breathe. To *think*.

Because whatever I’d done to piss her off this much... Yeah. It was serious.

Miss K exhaled sharply through her nose, crossing her arms as she stared me down.

“You wanna know what you *did*?” she said, her voice clipped, restrained—but packed with the kind of authority that made my skin prickle. “Let’s start with how you *walked* in here today, then. Like you were looking for a fight. And I don’t mean the normal, ‘*we’re in a dojo and here to train*’ kind of fight—I mean *fight*. Like you were ready to tear into anyone who so much as breathed wrong in your direction.”

I opened my mouth to argue, but she wasn’t done.

“Your body language? Aggressive as fuck. Tension in your shoulders, steps heavy, eyes sharp. You were *hunting*. And you’re damn lucky the rest of the group isn’t attuned enough to combat yet to pick up on it—because if they had? If they’d noticed the way you were carrying yourself? You might’ve started a fight you weren’t prepared for.”

I clenched my jaw, trying to process. I... hadn’t noticed. I really *hadn’t*.

But the way she was saying it—like it was fact—made my stomach twist.

“And that’s before we even get into the fight.”

I tensed.

“You’ve improved a *lot* since you were last here,” she admitted. “A level of improvement that should have been impossible; not this level of improvement. But we both know you’re not quite normal now, don’t we? It should’ve been something to be proud of; or at the very least, happy.”

The way she said it, though, told me that this wasn’t a compliment.

I barely had a second to register that before she dropped the hammer.

“So tell me, *Miss Vildea*—what the *fuck* changed that you suddenly started throwing punches meant to *kill*?”

The room felt colder.

My breath hitched.

“I—”

“You weren’t sparring,” she cut in, her voice growing sharper, more furious. “You weren’t training. You were trying to *kill* me. You aimed for the throat, repeatedly. I can handle it, no problem. But they—” she jabbed a finger toward the door, “—*can’t*. I wouldn’t have said

anything, if you had simply decided to test your limits against me. But you weren't just reckless like that with me, were you? That fight with Kenzie?"

She let out a sharp, humorless laugh. "Tell me, Miss Vildea—when the fuck did you aim to turn this dojo session into a blood feud? Because that's where you were heading."

My stomach plummeted.

Because I started to realize—*she was right*.

The truth settled in like ice-cold water running down my spine, numbing everything in its path. My breath caught, my body stiffening as Miss K's words drilled deeper.

"Every single one of your offensive moves was aimed to *cripple*," she said, her voice measured, firm. "Not to pressure. Not to train. To *seriously injure*. To *incapacitate*. To *kill*."

She leaned in closer, her golden eyes burning with something I couldn't place. "Kenzie wasn't scrambling because she was off her game. She was scrambling because she was *desperately* trying to keep up without resorting to the same kill-or-be-killed level *you* did."

I felt the blood drain from my face.

I wanted to deny it. *Argue*. Say that wasn't my intention.

But the moment my mind replayed the fight—every attack, every strike, every time I cut off her movements instead of testing her reflexes—

And the horrifying truth settled in my gut like a stone.

She wasn't wrong. Not even a little.

I saw it.

I *felt* it.

I had been *hunting her*.

I had gone after her like she was a real enemy—like it had been Valir.

Not a sparring partner. Not someone I was meant to train with.

And then my mind snapped back to the very last thing I had seen before the world had flipped.

My fist. Plummeting toward Kenzie's *throat*.

Full-force.

Aimed to *crush it* without a second thought.

I sucked in a breath so hard my chest hurt.

My eyes snapped to Miss K, wide, horrified, but she wasn't looking at me with sympathy.

She was waiting. Because she knew.

She knew the exact moment I would put the pieces together, there were only two options left. Options that I felt deep within me, bubbling to the surface.

The first was *anger*. The urge to defend myself.

Not the logical kind. Not the anger that burned bright and fast before fading into frustration.

No—this was deep. Ugly.

A part of me that had always been there, lurking in the background, waiting to take over.

The part of me I ignored with all my might—the part that had apparently been in control.

It hated being called out. Hated being blamed.

Like this was somehow *my* fault? Like I had *chosen* to be like this?

What the fuck did Miss K know about any of it?!

I wasn't some rabid animal attacking for no reason—I was *defending myself*! I was using what I had *learned*. What I had *needed* to survive!

What the hell else was I supposed to do?! I didn't have a choice!

It wasn't my fault!

My vision blurred, my breath ragged, my entire body tensed like a coil ready to snap—I felt arms wrap around me.

Miss K's. Strong. Steady.

My whole body *locked up*.

My mind went blank, that first voice *screaming* at the sudden, unexpected contact—wanting to *hide*, to *lash out*, to *kill*, to *get away from it all*.

But I didn't move.

I couldn't.

Because the second option had been there, lurking beneath the anger, beneath the instinct to destroy. The option that only ever existed when I was afforded the luxury of it.

Regret.

The option to learn, to try again, to have a second chance.

And somehow—for some unknown reason—Miss K was willing to give it to me.

Despite what I had done. Despite who I was. Despite *what* I was.

Her arms around me told me that.

She wasn't pinning me down. She wasn't restraining me. She wasn't trying to beat the lesson into me, even though I deserved it.

She was *holding* me.

Like she was willing to let me have this. This undeserved moment of weakness. This luxury that I had no right to claim.

Why?

I couldn't tell. It didn't make sense.

Miss K didn't know me. Not really.

She barely knew anything beyond what she had seen in these sessions.

She hadn't seen what I had done, what I *was*.

Yet she was cradling me.

And my tears were flowing. I couldn't stop them, despite my best attempts to do so.

Bile rose in my throat, burning hot, choking me as my mind replayed every movement, every choice I had made today, every strike I had thrown with intent.

The realization was suffocating.

I tried to pull away, desperate to free myself from her grip, desperate not to taint her with what I was.

But her arms—strong, steady, unyielding—did not budge in the slightest.

At some point, I realized I was crying—full-throated, miserable, broken.

At some point, I realized I had vomited, that it had caked onto Miss K's shoulder, onto my mouth, hot and acidic and disgusting.

And she still hadn't let go.

The feeling of regret was all-consuming.

'Why did I do this?'

It hadn't been the [Murder] level-up. The System didn't work like that.

It gave me knowledge, muscle memory—tools. But it didn't force me to use them.

I knew that.

I knew because every move, every step, every decision I had made today—Had been *my own choice*.

I had *chosen* to be this aggressive.

I had *chosen* to kill.

Because I was fundamentally broken—had long shattered into pieces too jagged to ever fit back together without leaving sharp edges, dangerous spikes, and fragile, splintering weak spots, ready to fall apart again at any moment.

Like I just had.

My thoughts spiraled, looping, collapsing in on themselves—serrated, chaotic, too barbed to hold, too rough to make sense of.

But then—A voice.

Low. Quiet. Steady.

"It's okay, Sera. You're alright. You'll be fine."

Miss K's voice.

I barely registered it at first, my mind still a storm of panic and self-destruction. But she kept speaking, her tone never wavering, never letting me drift too far into the chaos.

"Whatever happened, you're safe now. I won't let anything happen to you, I promise on my title of Grandmaster of Martial Arts."

"*Safe*."

The word felt foreign. Out of place. Alien.

"I'd rather die than let one of my pupils get hurt, okay? You are safe here."

I didn't know how to react. How to process any of it.

My brain *tried* to analyze her words, to dissect them, to pick them apart like I always did.

But nothing stuck. I couldn't comprehend anything beyond their literal meaning.

Safe?

Protected?

A promise?

None of it computed at all. Those words *had* no meaning, I knew.

But she kept going regardless.

"Take your time, however long you need. I'll stay with you. You're safe."

And then—time blurred.

I lost track of everything.

The next thing I knew, I was still in her arms, my body stiff and cramped, my skin cold, like I had been sitting there for days without realizing it.

My voice cracked as I finally spoke, my words small, uncertain.

“...Miss K, can you—can you let me go?”

She did.

No hesitation. No questions. No resistance.

She simply let me go.

I sucked in a shaky breath, trying to ground myself—trying to pull my thoughts out of the chaotic spiral they’d been locked in. My arms wrapped around my torso, an instinctive attempt to warm myself up, to reestablish some kind of control over my body.

And just moving—just holding onto myself—was enough to start the process.

The dull cold that had seeped into my limbs started to fade, chased away by the simple act of shifting, of being present again. My fingers curled against my arms, my breathing slowed, and sensation returned in increments—first a faint tingling in my hands, then my shoulders, then the slow spread of warmth through my chest.

Then, finally, the full weight of reality hit me.

My face felt stiff. *Sticky*. Uncomfortably so.

My fingers brushed against my skin, and—‘*oh fuck.*’

Tears. Dried tears. Drool. Bile.

My stomach twisted with renewed mortification.

I was utterly *disgusting*.

And then my brain caught up to one very specific, very important detail—Miss K was still *right there*.

She was still *watching me*, carefully, like she was waiting for something.

I froze.

Then, with the kind of speed only sheer embarrassment could provide, I scrubbed at my face with my sleeve, trying to clean off the absolute *mess* that had decided to make itself at home there.

'Jesus fucking Christ, I must look like an absolute fucking disaster...!'

My hair was probably tangled, my eyes red and puffy, my breath was definitely awful—And I had vomited on her; straight on, full-bile, stomach contents and all!

A full-body cringe ran through me, my hands working double-time to at least somewhat salvage my dignity.

But then—A sound.

A soft, low chuckle.

I stiffened, cautiously glancing up just in time to see something genuinely unexpected.

Miss K was smiling.

Not a smirk, not some condescending 'look at this idiot' expression—just... a real, easy, warm smile.

"I'm happy you're back," she said simply.

And I blinked.

"Back...?" I mouthed.

The word sat in my brain for a second, not quite clicking. I opened my mouth—instinctively reaching for some dry, dismissive remark—but stopped myself.

Because something in my gut told me to *really* think about what she meant.

And when I did, the realization hit me like a freight train.

I hadn't been myself today, had I? Not one bit.

Not when I walked into the dojo like I was looking for a fight, my body language screaming violence. Not when I went after Kenzie with single-minded aggression, treating her like a target instead of a training partner. Not when my first instinct *wasn't* to wipe my face and worry about how I looked but to push away. To hurt. To attack. To dominate.

But *this*? This was me.

The me who worried about stupid, meaningless things.

The me who cared if my face was streaked with tears.

The me who sat here, suddenly horrified at the idea of sitting next to a stupidly attractive person while looking like absolute garbage.

...Not to say that I was crushing on my teacher, of course. That would be fucking crazy.

I cleared my throat a couple of times, trying to shake off the lingering embarrassment, before bowing my head slightly toward Miss K.

"I apologize for... well, everything, really," I said, my voice rough. "I'm sorry for causing a scene, for messing up the session, and for making you take time—"

Before I could even finish, she casually chopped me on the head.

Not hard, but enough to surprise me.

"Don't apologize for making me do my job, you dumbass," she said, her tone teasing but firm.

I blinked, startled.

"I'm your *sensei*. That means watching out for your mental health just as much as it means teaching you how to throw a punch," she continued, arms crossing as she leaned back. "And you definitely needed some help today, Sera. So don't apologize for that. Not to *me*, at least."

Then she tilted her head, a pointed look in her golden eyes.

"Kenzie, on the other hand..."

My stomach dropped.

"Oh. Oh fuck."

Only now did it hit me—I had just disappeared into Miss K's office, however long ago, after brutally attacking Kenzie for no good reason. No explanation. No acknowledgment. Just a full-blown assault mid-sparring followed by me vanishing like some kind of unhinged ghost.

"She's going to *hate* me... I fucked it all—"

"Calm down, Sera."

Miss K's voice cut through the spiral before it could fully take hold, sharp and steady enough to pull my attention back to her.

"You'll have time to apologize *after* we're done here," she assured me. "And don't worry about Kenzie too much—she's a lot more resilient than you're giving her credit for."

She chuckled lightly, shaking her head.

"You don't get sent to *my* dojo without some baggage. Be it personal, professional, or otherwise." Her gaze softened just a fraction. "Kenzie, much like the rest of you, has her own problems to deal with. She won't *despise* you for a single mistake. That's not the kind of person she is."

I swallowed, still not entirely convinced. But *god*, I wanted to believe her.

“And while I *did* say I don’t need your apology, I *do* still need an explanation, or rather, a guarantee,” Miss K continued. Her golden eyes locked onto mine, pinning me in place.

“I don’t need to know your personal history, your problems in life, or whatever else you’ve got going on. But I *do* need to know that it won’t happen again. That you’ve got yourself under control.” She took a slow step closer, then another, closing the distance until she was just there, her presence overwhelming in a way that wasn’t meant to intimidate—but to make sure I heard her.

“We can go through exercises together,” she offered, “to get your mind focused again, if that’s what you’d prefer.”

Then she leaned down, her gaze perfectly level with mine, her voice dropping just enough to make the next words feel heavier. “And if you *do* need to talk about what you’re going through, I will listen. And I will help wherever I can.”

There was a weight in her stare. Something deep. Unspoken. A tide of understanding that flowed from her to me without a single extra word needing to be said.

And I realised immediately: She knew.

In hindsight, it was obvious.

Nobody earned the title of Grandmaster in anything—not in this world—without going through their fair share of hell. Without scraping through life-and-death situations, without carrying their own share of scars, without having blood on their hands.

So, of course she could tell.

She probably didn’t know everything; *couldn’t* know everything. Not all the things I kept locked up inside, not all the demons caged deep inside, not all the thoughts going through my head.

But she knew *enough*.

She knew what had pushed me to this breaking point.

She knew I had killed someone.

Not an accident.

Not like the first time—where circumstances had forced my hand with Jade being in danger, where I had tried not to aim for anything important, only for it to happen anyway through sheer bad luck.

No.

This time, I had chosen it.

Sure, my Ego had been overeager in following my orders; but they were still *my* orders. I had chosen to give that specific order, not any of the hundreds of others that I could have given to achieve a similar result, without any deaths.

I had made the decision, not out of necessity, but out of intent.

And she had known the second I threw my first punch at her.

She had seen it—the raw, unfiltered violence behind my fist aimed at her throat. The way my body moved with it, how I had thrown my weight behind it with perfect technique—just as she had taught me. Only, this time, there had been malice behind it.

Because she knew what it did to a person—the weight it put on the soul, the way it irrevocably *changed* you.

Because she had seen this before.

Because she recognized the symptoms of someone trying to deal with something that *couldn't* be dealt with.

Because she understood exactly what kind of war I was fighting in my own head right now:

A guilt, not for the killing itself, but for the lack thereof.

A disgust at oneself, for the actions taken, that had to be taken.

A confusion, at the contradiction.

“I killed two people yesterday,” I said, the words leaving my mouth before I had the chance to second-guess them. My voice was steady. Steadier than I ever thought it could be.

Miss K didn't react—no flinch, no shift in expression, no judgment.

So I kept going.

“Me and... a friend. We got into some trouble with a gang—pissed off the wrong people. So they sent enforcers after us. I *tried*—” I exhaled sharply, shaking my head, “—I tried *not* to let it get to that point. I really did. But no matter what I did, they just kept pushing. They wouldn't back off. I had the better equipment, the means to end it—but I *didn't*. Not immediately.”

I swallowed, my hands tightening into fists against my lap.

“Because I was scared. Scared to face myself in the mirror afterward. Still am.”

My voice trailed off, but I didn't look away. My eyes stayed locked on Miss K's, searching, waiting—half-expecting something. *Anything*.

But she remained silent.

Just watching. Just listening.

And somehow, that made it easier to keep talking.

“But then I saw my friend,” I continued. “She was going to die. And something just... flipped.”

I let out a breath—half-exhale, half-laugh, but humorless, bitter.

“And suddenly, I didn’t care anymore. I could have stopped. I disarmed him. Crippled him. He was done. I had already won. But... it *wasn’t enough*.”

My breathing was surprisingly steady, my thoughts unnaturally clear as I recounted, “I cut his head off. He was unarmed. *Defenseless*. And then I killed his friend, too—the one threatening my friend. It wasn’t self-defense; not at that point. It was murder.”

Saying it out loud made my stomach churn—No, it didn’t.

It should have.

“I could have stopped earlier. I *should* have stopped earlier. I could have resolved it without killing either of them... But I chose not to.”

Confessing my sins like this, sitting face-to-face with Miss K while her golden-brown eyes bore into mine without a shred of judgment, forced me to confront something I had never dared to before. And yet, as the words left my mouth, I couldn’t deny them, “Because they *deserved* it. Because I judged them unworthy of life. Because I had the means to enact that very judgment.”

The next thought came easily, my voice shifting, laced with something darker as heat simmered in my veins. “They abused my goodwill and hurt my friend. Hurt *me*. So I killed them in turn. They betrayed my attempts at being nice, spat in my face for offering the other cheek. I do not feel regret over it. I do not feel sad that they’re dead. I’m glad they are. I do not feel guilt, because they all fucking *deserved* it. Every single one of them.”

I realized just how unhinged I sounded.

That wasn’t a reason to kill someone.

Judging them myself wasn’t how things were supposed to work. There were rules, laws, at least in my old world. Maybe not here, but still.

I *should* feel guilty. I *should* feel bad for killing them; for killing *him*.

But I didn’t. And I knew I never would.

There would always be people who’d try to understand; many who would think they did.

People who would say it wasn’t my fault, that I had acted in self-defense. They’d say what the therapists once had, that I had been *forced* into it. That I had *no choice*.

Especially in this world, they would justify it for me. Life was cheap here, I knew this.

But they all *didn’t* understand. They never could; they never would.

Because there was something I could never say; never admit to anyone, least of all myself.

Because there wasn't just an *absence* of guilt.

There was *glee*.

I had *enjoyed* killing him. I had *enjoyed* killing them, too.

That moment—the instant the Enforcer's eyes widened in the purest, most unfiltered terror—the exact second he recognized death was coming for him and there was nothing he could do about it...

I could still *taste* it.

Like I had sucked his very soul straight from his eye sockets the moment my blade severed his head from his body.

I hadn't just *enjoyed* it. I had *loved* it.

And that, more than anything, was what truly scared me. What truly disgusted me.

"I don't know what to do."

The words spilled out before I could stop them, but they were the truth.

Something was wrong with me. Deeply wrong.

And I didn't know what, or how to fix it.

If it even *could* be fixed.

Or worse—if it even *needed* to be...