

“Geralt and Yen would probably find this place too weird for their tastes, but I have to say, I am really starting to like it,” Ciri thought to herself as she walked through the streets of Kuoh.

She’d been exploring the town all day, taking full advantage of the warmer turn that the weather had taken that week. It wouldn’t last, from what Rias had said, as they were going into their colder months, but that day was nice and she was more than happy to enjoy it. This world wasn’t entirely peaceful, she knew, and there were threats in it that exceeded almost all the threats in her world, but Kuoh itself seemed like a place that was, more often than that, quiet, and she’d already found that she adored that.

“How long has it been since I enjoyed any sort of prolonged peace and quiet?” she thought to herself, shaking her head. Her life had been one long struggle since the fall of Cintra, and while she did appreciate being able to take a break from it, part of her did fear that she’d start to go stir-crazy if it went on too long.

“What the...” she asked aloud as a mildly acrid scent suddenly reached her nose.

It seemed almost familiar, like something she’d come across before while traveling with Geralt, and it put her on edge instantly. Looking around, she noticed that none of the locals noticed at all and, not wanting to alarm anyone, she quickly ducked into an alley before hopping onto a nearby roof to get a better view of the area. The scent was fainter there, and yet, with no one else around, she found it easier to get a lock on where it was coming from, narrowing her eyes as she determined that the source was a small warehouse. Teleporting over to its roof, she drew her sword, which Luna had been kind enough to turn invisible along with its scabbard, and smiled as she saw it seem to materialize in her hand.

“I should probably get the others, but there’s no harm in doing a little reconnaissance first,” Ciri thought to herself as she walked to the back of the roof, carefully hung down to get a look inside the window, and then teleported inside.

The scent was definitely stronger there, and as she crept through the dark, oddly dank warehouse, she finally remembered what it reminded her of. Kikimores smelled a little like this, not so much that she feared one had somehow made it to this world, but enough that the similarity was noticeable, and when she heard the faint sound of chittering, she grinned, teleporting out of the way just in time as a splash of what turned out to be acid hit the ground where she’d just been.

“Ooh, you’re tricky,” a female voice called out, and Ciri’s eyes went wide as she noticed that what had attacked her had the upper body of a naked, buxom woman and the lower body of a spider. “I wonder if you’re tasty too!”

“A stray devil,” she realized, peering down from the rafter she’d teleported onto. *“I guess I can spare Rias the trouble.”*

Without another thought, she leapt down, slicing clean through the monstrous woman’s neck.

“Sorry to bother everyone so late in the evening, but we just received a report that a stray devil was spotted coming our way, and we’ve been ordered to put it down,” Rias replied.

“I can marshal the green minions,” Hermione nodded, still feeling like she was floating after how thoroughly Harry had fucked her brains out earlier. “What are we looking for?”

“Another woman,” Rias replied. “This one mutated to develop a spider-like form that...”

“Rias, look what I found!” Ciri exclaimed as she teleported in just then, holding the headless body of what was clearly a stray devil over her head. Its severed head was tied to her belt, looking like a really, really macabre coin purse, and every devil there just blinked in confusion at her. “I think it’s one of those stray devils you mentioned before.”

“Well, that was easy,” Kiba muttered. “I’m going to bed.”

He floated upstairs, and Akeno watched him go, figuring that if he was still that maudlin in the morning, she’d need to speak to Rias about it.

“How did you find her?” Rias asked. “I just got the report calling for her to be hunted down and removed.”

“I noticed an odd scent in the air and investigated,” Ciri replied. “I am rather well trained at hunting and killing monsters.”

“Well, well done,” Rias smiled as a sudden scream drew attention.

“What the fuck is that?!” Mio exclaimed, and she chuckled, destroying the stray’s body with a wave of her hand.

“Nothing we need to worry about,” Rias replied. “Just a bit of pest control that Ciri here took care of.”

“Neat,” Maria said, yawning. “Mio, you should probably get some rest. We’ll continue in the morning.”

“Okay,” Mio replied, feeling just as exhausted after their long training session.

“Where’s Harry?” Maria asked. “I don’t feel his presence here.”

“He’s taking care of a contract,” Rias replied. “I...”

Before she could finish that sentence, a knock came to the door, and Luna flew over to answer it, revealing Sona and Tsubaki.

“I hope we haven’t come at a bad time,” the Sitri heiress murmured, spotting the severed head hanging from Ciri’s belt.

“Not at all,” Rias replied as she destroyed it too. “Is this a simple house call or...”

“It isn’t,” Sona replied.

“What’s wrong?” Hermione asked as Sona and her queen walked in.

“Those two agents of the church you mentioned earlier, they contacted me,” she replied.

“They contacted you?” Rias asked.

“What did they want?” Akeno asked, growing tense.

“To meet,” Sona replied. “I suspect that they mostly want to discuss why they were sent here, but they specifically said that they wanted to meet with whoever lived here.”

“They mentioned the Rookery directly?” Fleur asked.

“They did,” Sona replied. “Would you be willing to meet them here tomorrow morning?”

“They’re willing to walk into a devil’s home?” Rias asked. “They’re either very brave, very foolish, or very desperate.”

“None of those are mutually exclusive,” Sona replied. “I can inform them that we’d prefer a different venue if you aren’t comfortable, but...”

“No, it’s fine,” Rias replied. “You’ll come as well, I trust.”

“Of course,” Sona nodded. “They didn’t strike me as directly hostile, so I’m hoping that they aren’t here for us, but one of them felt...emotional in a way that suggested this was somehow personal for her. I can bring my entire peerage if you’d like.”

“No, we’ll have quite a bit of firepower here, and I doubt that two agents of heaven would walk into a devil’s abode directly if they wanted a fight,” Rias replied.

“I’ll still come along,” Tsubaki murmured.

“Right,” Sona nodded. “I’ll see you all in the morning.”

“See you, Sona,” Rias smiled, watching as her old friend and her queen left.

“Why would they want to meet with us?” Fleur asked.

“Maybe they want our help,” Asia chimed in.

“Doubtful,” Koneko replied dryly.

“Most likely they either want to question us about what they’re here for or get us to agree to stay out of their way,” Rias said. “We know that they’re interested in Issei Hyoudou’s murder, but that can’t be why they were sent.”

“It might help us build some level of rapport with them, though,” Asia murmured. “You avenged his death, and if he meant something to that brunette, that might be enough for her to open up about why they’re here. If we could help them with whatever task they’ve been given...”

“They’re not going to want our help, Asia,” Rias said.

“If we could help them, though, it might get them to leave sooner,” Hermione argued. “We’ve had quite enough excitement lately, and none of us need the church poking their noses around Kuoh.”

“Hermione has a point,” Akeno said and Rias sighed.

"We'll have to find out what exactly they're doing here first," the redhead replied, not believing for a moment that they'd find any sort of common ground with the newcomers, even if one of them did care for the boy they'd avenged. Reaching out to her husband across their mental link, she projected, "*Harry, how goes your contract? There's been a minor development here we should discuss.*"

"I'll tell you all about it soon," Harry replied, sounding oddly tense.

"Is everything okay?" Rias asked.

"Just fine," Harry replied, and she shrugged, deciding to take him at his word. After all, how much trouble could he have gotten into with a simple contract?

"If you're one of *those* Potters, then you are my descendant," Azazel confirmed. "About seven hundred years ago, your supposed ancestor married his first cousin and then suffered a terrible injury in a duel. They sought my help, wanting to conceive a child and him, er...missing a few parts, and while I couldn't help him with that, I did selflessly give my aid in other ways. She was a Potter too, so the bloodline continued, and no one was ever the wiser."

"Don't trust him!" Leviathan exclaimed. "*Whatever else he is to you, he's your enemy, as he is the enemy of all devils.*"

Harry knew that, and yet the ancient and frighteningly powerful being didn't seem even slightly hostile. Azazel could have killed or abducted him the moment he saw him, having lured him into a trap he had no idea about, and yet he hadn't.

"Why lure me out like this?" Harry asked. "You clearly didn't think I'd recognize you."

"I'm very curious about how you did," Azazel chuckled. "Sirzechs told Michael and me about what you are, and I was fascinated, so I thought I'd pop over and get a look at you myself."

"Why would Sirzechs do that?" Leviathan asked.

"You two really are serious about your efforts to establish lasting peace between us," Harry murmured, and Azazel nodded.

"At the moment, I'd settle for a more formal detente, but lasting peace is the long-term goal," he replied. "I don't know how much he's told you, even with you being his brother-in-law, but suffice it to say we fear there are forces out there that are going to become a pain in all our asses soon enough, and banding together against them would be for the best."

"What forces?" Harry asked, furrowing his brow in confusion.

"Not my place to say, kid," Azazel replied. "When you inevitably tell him that we spoke, ask and see what he tells you. This, more than anything, is why you have nothing to fear from me. Harming Sirzechs' brother-in-law would be a great way to, as you Brits would say, bugger up the whole thing, and that is the last thing I want."

"Then why did four of your agents stir up shit in Rias territory mere weeks ago?" Harry asked, and Azazel sighed.

“They are dead then, huh?” he asked. “If they overstepped their mandate, which I strongly suspect they did, I apologize. They were to observe a sacred gear user I feared might become unstable and report back for further instructions.”

“Instead of that, they just killed him and tried to steal another sacred gear from a human they brought over,” Harry replied. “Rias brought her into her service.”

“Fuck,” Azazel muttered, shaking her head. “It can be so hard to get good help.”

“Why investigate sacred gear users at all?” Harry asked.

“To see if they might be useful to me,” Azazel replied freely, “and also to see if they might be unstable enough to become dangerous. When the Lord made them, he trapped a lot of significantly powerful beings in his creations, and sometimes...things go very poorly with them.”

“Why do you care?” Harry asked, curious.

“Because the sacred gears are, to baseline humans, magic, and when a user of one of them does something incredibly stupid, it can result in backlash that reaches the magical communities,” Azazel replied. “Having sired a fair number of their ancestors, I make a point of trying to keep them safe from things like that. You were one before you were turned, right?”

“I am one of *those* Potters, as you put it,” Harry replied.

“Excellent,” Azazel grinned. “I do still have every intention of entering into a legitimate contract with you, not wanting to have outright wasted your time.”

“I actually think he’s being sincere,” Leviathan breathed, sounding stunned. *“Things have changed a lot since my day.”*

“What sort of contract?” Harry asked.

“Sit, have a drink with me, and tell me a few stories about your time in whichever magical school you attended before a buxom redhead made you want to drop everything and fly halfway across the world; I’ve been there; and I will grant you a piece from my rather substantial art collection,” Azazel grinned. “Do we have a deal?”

“Three stories,” Harry clarified, and Azazel nodded. “What are we drinking?”

“I have sake, though, given that you’re...” the fallen angel went to say.

“Sake’s fine,” Harry replied, and he grinned.

“Very well,” Azazel nodded.

“So, to make any of these stories from Hogwarts make sense, I will need to give you a little background,” Harry replied, figuring that he either already knew about Voldemort, given his apparent interest in him, or would find out eventually. “When I was a baby, this psycho tried to kill me, only for his spell to blow up in his face. That would have been the end of him, but he’d cut his soul into pieces and...”

“He came back,” Azazel said grimly as he poured a couple glasses and sat down, gesturing for Harry to do the same.

“I destroyed his horcruxes and finished him off eventually, but for several years there he was a giant pain in my ass,” Harry replied. “So in my first year there...”

“Azazel?!” Rias exclaimed the next morning, glaring down at him as Harry sat at the table, wincing as her shouting exacerbated his headache. “You knowingly went drinking with the governor general of the Fallen Angels? Are you insane?”

“In his defense, Rias, Azazel really did seem to come in peace,” Leviathan said, sticking out of his hand just then, as he’d figured he would need back up on this one.

“We drank sake; I told him a few stories about my time at Hogwarts before I met you, he gave me a few lessons about harem management that I barely remember just now, and then he gave me that statuette,” Harry replied.

“She’s beautiful,” Luna sighed as she peered closely at the marble statuette he’d placed in front of him. “Who is she?”

“That is apparently his best guess about what the Archangel Gabriel looks like naked,” Harry replied. “He sculpted it himself.”

“I still can’t believe Gabriel’s a woman,” Hermione murmured. “Why did you not flee when Leviathan told you who he was?”

“He could have killed me before she ever got the chance if he’d wanted to,” Harry replied. “He clearly didn’t mean to kill me, so I figured taking him up on his contract offer might help me figure out what he did want.”

“Which was?” Rias asked testily.

“I have no fucking idea,” Harry admitted. “It’s possible that he really did just want to see the incubus for himself, having heard about me from Sirzechs.”

“I didn’t think that Sirzechs told them who the incubus was, though,” Akeno said.

“Honestly, it wouldn’t be too difficult to learn that there was a living incubus and conclude that it was probably the commoner I married,” Rias replied. “That’s not why I wanted to marry you...”

“The mind-melting sex wasn’t a factor?” Luna asked, and the redhead rolled her eyes.

“It’s not all of why I wanted to marry you, but you being what you are makes that make more sense to outsiders,” Rias replied. “I dearly hope that Michael hasn’t told any of his underlings just yet. It’s probably not why those women are here but...”

“It very likely isn’t,” Harry said. “The one thing I managed to get out of Azazel last night is that there really is some outside threat gathering that has all three factions worried. I doubt that Michael would be any more willing to fuck up peace talks by sending people after me than Azazel is. Agrippa’s lessons painted him as a rather level-headed adversary.”

“He is, though we can’t dismiss the possibility that the Tyrant has changed his mind,” Rias muttered, and Asia looked anguished at the thought of her god wanting Harry harmed.

“We should absolutely make sure this statuette has been put away before they get here,” Akeno chuckled, and Rias rolled her eyes.

“I doubt they know what Gabriel looks like, but yes,” she replied.

“I’ll find somewhere for it,” Harry murmured, looking over as Sirius walked in, looking as rough as he had when he stumbled in the night before.

“Haruka and I went to a karaoke bar,” he explained. “Where are the hangover potions?”

“Here,” Hermione murmured, pulling a couple out of her moleskin pouch and handing one to both him and Harry, who immediately downed them.

“Why do you need...wow, who’s the babe?” Sirius asked, openly gawking at Gabriel’s image as he felt the potion take effect.

“One of the most powerful archangels in existence,” Koneko replied. “You get that if she ever learned about this it would probably end badly, right?”

“We’ll keep it well hidden,” Harry replied, looking up as he saw Kiba come down the stairs, followed closely by Ciri, Mio, and Maria. He looked rough for entirely different reasons; the bags under his eyes suggesting that he didn’t sleep terribly well the night before, and he sighed.

“What’s going on?” the blonde boy asked immediately, seeing how serious many of them looked. “Is it those women from the church?”

“No,” Rias replied. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Kiba replied. “Ciri said that they’re coming by this morning.”

“They are, and I expect everyone to let Sona and me do the talking,” Rias said firmly, and he nodded.

“What’s going on?” Sirius asked.

“Those agents of the church are coming by for a chat,” Hermione replied. “I’ve already sent Gnarl and the others to the basement.”

“Right,” Sirius nodded. “Speaking of things that would require banishing them to the basement, we’re still on for Friday, right?”

“We’ll make a small dining room of one of the empty rooms upstairs for the five of us,” Harry replied. “Maria’s planning to make a tonne of tonkotsu ramen and...”

“You’re sure you’re willing to?” Sirius asked.

“I like cooking, and I think I’ve proven by now that I’m pretty good at it,” Maria preened. “It will just you, your girlfriend and her daughter, and these two?”

“A more intimate thing,” Rias nodded. “The purpose of this is really to let Harry and Sirius’ girlfriend get to know each other, and dinners around here are usually rather loud and hectic because there are so many of us here.”

“Increasingly reminds me of the Burrow,” Hermione murmured, and Harry smiled.

“It will be nice to...” he went to say when another knock came to the door. “Sirius, could you take that statue upstairs and put it in my room somewhere?”

“Will do,” Sirius nodded.

“My room,” Harry called after him, making him laugh as Akeno answered the door and Mio and Maria went upstairs, figuring it was probably best to stay out of what was clearly devil business.

They all stiffened a little as the Sitri heiress walked in, followed by her loyal queen and the two girls they’d seen in Motohama’s memory. They were wearing the same conspicuous robes that they had been in that memory, their cloaks mostly concealing their swords, though as Kiba noticed the hilt of Xenovia’s sword sticking out, he tensed and glared at them.

“It’s okay,” Koneko whispered, subtly rubbing his arm.

“Rias,” Sona nodded. “These are Xenovia Quarta and Irina Shidou.”

“Good morning,” Rias said, standing up. “I am Rias Gremory and...”

“We’re aware of each of you,” Xenovia cut in. “The scope of our investigation wouldn’t necessarily have included you, as we quickly ruled out the involvement of the devils in the matter we were tasked with, but there were...”

“What happened to Issei Hyoudou?” Irina asked, making her blue-haired counterpart wince.

“He was murdered by dickhead fallen angels,” Koneko replied before anyone else could. “We put them down for it.”

“What?” Irina asked in shock. “Why?”

“Why does it matter to you?” Rias asked pointedly. “Who was he to you?”

“A friend...when we were kids,” Irina replied. “Why did the fallen angels kill him? What exactly happened?”

“This is outside of the scope of your investigation, as Xenovia said,” Sona chided. “I would like to know what brought you here.”

“I’m curious about that myself,” Rias murmured. “Tell me why agents of the church are in a small Japanese town with no Christian connections left, and I’ll tell you everything I know about what happened to your friend.”

“As I imagine you know, the holy sword Excalibur was broken ages ago,” Xenovia replied. “Seven swords were forged from its remains, six of which we knew the locations of until very recently.”

“What happened?” Kiba asked, his jaw tensing further.

“Three of them were stolen,” Xenovia replied. “We have reason to believe that the people who did it were agents of the fallen.”

“Fallen angels have three of the seven Excaliburs in their possession?” Rias asked as Sona’s eyes widened.

“They were stolen by an organized group of thieves, one of whom we managed to identify,” Xenovia replied. “His name is Pietro D’Angelo, and he’s a known associate of an excommunicated exorcist by the name of...”

“Sellzen,” Harry breathed.

“Freed Sellzen, yes,” Xenovia nodded. “You know of him?”

“He was working with the angels who murdered your friend,” Harry replied.

“Was?” Xenovia asked, giving him a pointed look.

“He murdered an innocent man in town and, after an extensive interrogation, we executed him for what we honestly could have just called crimes against humanity,” Rias replied.

“He didn’t know anything about the Excalibur heist, though,” Akeno added.

“How do you know that?” Irina asked.

“We fed him a potion that makes people answer questions honestly and then compelled him to list all of his crimes,” Hermione replied. “That wasn’t one of them.”

“We didn’t ask him about other crimes he was actively planning,” Luna pointed out.

“Right,” Hermione sighed.

“Normally, I’d be incensed about an exorcist, even an excommunicated one being killed by devils, but...” Xenovia went to say.

“We have a transcript of everything he confessed to,” Harry said dryly. “If you read through it, you’ll know why we killed the son of a bitch.”

“Was he the one who killed Issei?” Irina asked.

“No, it was the fallen angels themselves who did that,” Rias replied. “Issei possessed a sacred gear, and they were tasked with observing him and determining whether or not he might become a threat.”

“From what we uncovered, they exceeded their orders by killing him as they did, but that wasn’t the only crime they committed in this town without orders from their superiors,” Harry added.

“You know that how?” Xenovia asked.

“*Do not mention Azazel,*” Rias projected, and he nodded almost imperceptibly.

“We observed them extensively before we moved in for the kill,” Rias replied.

“What did you do to them?” Irina asked.

“Three of them were killed, and the fourth is rotting in the dungeon of my family castle,” Rias replied.

“Why?” Irina asked. “Why would devils take it upon themselves to avenge a murdered boy?”

“Because they’re good people,” Asia piped up, not liking her tone, and both of them turned to look at her.

“As I said, we learned each of your identities before coming here,” Xenovia murmured. “The townsfolk were all too happy to tell us just who lived in this unusual home, but even if they hadn’t, I’d recognize you, Asia Argento.”

“Really?” Asia asked warily.

“You’re rather infamous in our circles,” Irina replied. “The future saint turned witch, turned devil now. How did you manage to fall so far?”

“I didn’t,” Asia whimpered.

“You were a devout follower of God, one who would have been named a saint if you’d lived and died in his service, and now you serve his greatest enemies?” Xenovia said flatly. “How can that be called anything other than a fall on par with Lucifer’s?”

Asia took a deep breath to steady herself as the blue-haired girl spoke, and before any of the others could cut in, she said, “I am simply following his plan for me.”

Everyone, including the other devils all stared at her in muted surprise at that as Xenovia and Irina both spluttered.

“You...wha?” Irina asked. “How can you...how could you honestly believe that He would want you to become a devil?”

“He gave me my ability to heal people, including devils, and then his church kicked me out for using it,” Asia replied calmly. “I fell in with the fallen angels, who tried to murder me for my sacred gear, and then I was rescued by devils. Why would that whole sequence of events have happened if He did not want me to end up where I am?”

“That’s...that’s not how...” Xenovia spluttered.

“Hey, you lot are the ones who say he works in mysterious ways,” Tsubaki snickered, genuinely enjoying how taken aback the two irritating Christians seemed.

“I will hear no more of this blasphemy!” Xenovia hissed. “If you think that the Lord honestly wanted you to make yourself a creature of sin, you’re as mad as you are lost.”

“That is quite enough,” Harry said firmly, flaring his aura until the entire room was suffused with his demonic power. “We invited you into our home and have been nothing but gracious to you since you arrived, and you repay that with rudeness and contempt?”

“We’ve gotten off topic,” Rias murmured, “though if you are rude to one of my servants again, that will be the end of this meeting. Am I clear?”

“I think this meeting is at an end,” Xenovia replied. “We wanted to question you about Issei Hyoudou’s murder, and I have no reason to think that you’ve been dishonest with us on that topic. We also wanted to make it clear that we expect the devils in this town to stay out of the matter of the stolen blades entirely. This is between us and the fallen.”

“I have no problem with that,” Rias said.

“I do, actually,” Harry cut in, earning a querying look from her. “We have a common interest here, and I think it would actually be best if we worked together.”

“Why in the world would you want to work with us?” Irina asked. “You know what these swords do, right?”

“That’s precisely why,” Harry replied. “Fallen angels steal three Excaliburs and take them to a town full of devils, and you wonder why I might be a little disturbed by that?”

“You think they stole them to use them against you?” Xenovia asked.

“That’s...admittedly a strong possibility,” Sona murmured.

“I doubt whoever stole them did so because they thought they’d really tie a room together,” Harry drawled. “Do you have any evidence that they’re in town besides the connection to Sellzen?”

“When we examined that abandoned church yesterday, we detected a strong and recent fallen presence,” Irina replied.

“That church was where the angels who murdered your friend hid out while they were here,” Fleur said, and Irina’s purple eyes dimmed for a moment.

“You said you killed them weeks ago?” Xenovia asked. “No, this had to be more recent than that.”

“So we do have another fallen angel in town,” Sona sighed.

“We’re not friends, and I don’t expect that to change, but in this instance, we can be allies of convenience,” Harry said. “You want those swords back, and I want them the hell out of Kuoh.”

“Our superiors would be less than pleased to learn that we accepted the aid of devils,” Irina said, looking to Xenovia, who nodded.

“You know that the last time fallen angels ran amuck in this town not everyone survived it,” Akeno pointed out, and Irina flinched. “If us working together means that we get rid of them faster, that will diminish the possibility of more innocents getting caught in the crossfire.”

“We will consider it,” Xenovia said. “For now, though, we must be going.”

“Would you like something to eat before you go?” Luna asked, and hilariously, Xenovia’s stomach chose that moment to growl audibly.

“No,” she replied, and the two girls ran off.

“What was that?” Rias asked the moment they were gone.

“I think I laid out my reasoning pretty well back there,” Harry replied. “The sooner they get what they came for, the sooner they can leave, and the fallen angels wouldn’t steal those swords for no reason. Now, why did you not want them to know that Azazel is in town?”

“WHAT?” Sona exclaimed as Tsubaki’s jaw dropped.

“He and Harry met last night,” Rias said dryly, still annoyed about that. “If they learn that a cadre-level fallen angel is here, they’ll seek reinforcements, and I do not want this town crawling with members of the church.”

“Maybe we should get reinforcements,” Sona muttered. “How did you meet the leader of the fallen angels?”

“He lured me out under false pretenses to get me drunk,” Harry replied, and she blinked at him.

“Did you have to word it that way?” Fleur sighed.

“He heard what I was and wanted to see me up close,” Harry replied. “He reached out to us in the guise of a mortal wanting to make a contract with a devil.”

“And yet he did you no harm?” Sona asked. “This doesn’t make any sense.”

“Aside from a minor hangover, no,” Harry replied. “I’m not going to pretend that I understand it. The three factions are actively trying to work out a peace deal right now.”

“You all know about that?” Sona asked tersely, looking at Rias, who sighed.

“I think it might be quite relevant to the matter at hand,” she replied. “It’s possible that Azazel and the fallen have been using these supposed peace negotiations as a smokescreen to prepare an assault against both factions.”

“That...honestly doesn’t sound like him,” Hermione replied. “Nothing we’ve come across so far about him as made him out to be that Machiavellian a figure.”

“We also know that his command over his forces isn’t absolute,” Fleur piped up. “Maybe this is the work of a rogue faction.”

“If it is, then we’re probably still dealing with a cadre-level angel,” Sona sighed. “I couldn’t see anyone below that level having the nerve to take liberties like this.”

“Keep in mind that the four we dealt with before were all low-level angels,” Koneko pointed out.

“Yes, but their scheme was low-level too,” Sona replied. “No offense meant to you, Asia, but killing you and that mortal hardly compares to what we’re seriously contemplating might be a plot to kill the siblings of two of the four Satans.”

“It’s also possible that they hope to frame us for the crime,” Gasper piped up from his box. “That would put us at odds with heaven.”

“It seems entirely likely that the peace negotiations are a factor in this, whether they were never meant in good faith by the fallen or someone is actively trying to prevent them from succeeding,” Sona said. “I don’t know whether or not those two are going to accept our help, but we should reach out to the Underworld and inform the government of what’s happened here so far.”

“Meaning you want me to contact Sirzechs,” Rias murmured, and Sona gave her a flat look. “I’m just saying, your sister does handle our foreign affairs.”

“If Serafall learns that I think there might be someone in town who’s a threat to me, she’ll encase half of Japan in ice just to be safe,” her old friend muttered. “Please contact your brother.”

“I’ll reach out to him,” Rias sighed. “In the meantime, we need to make sure that we’re prepared for whatever is coming. Like before when we were dealing with the last group of fallen angels who bothered us, no one is to go out alone anymore until this matter is dealt with and we’re all to stick to teleportation wherever possible.”

“Mio might be a problem,” Luna murmured. “We have been telling people that you’re related and if you’re a target...”

“Damn it,” Rias muttered, burying her head in her hands.

“I will pass those same instructions on to my peerage,” Sona said. “Whatever this is, Rias, we will handle it together.”

“Thank you,” Rias nodded, watching as she and Tsubaki left. As she saw Kiba head towards the backdoor, she called out, “Kiba...”

“I’m not going to leave the property,” Kiba promised, walking out into the backyard.

“Let me,” Harry whispered, kissing Rias’ cheek before following him out.

“I don’t suppose you’d be willing to make Mio and Maria parts of your peerage,” Ciri suggested, having observed that entire exchange in thoughtful silence. “They’d be able to teleport then.”

“I...I do have the pieces for it,” Rias murmured, “but they still want to go home, and that wouldn’t be an option if they joined us.”

“Technically speaking, they want to avenge Mio’s parents,” Luna said. “That doesn’t mean they’d have to stay in their old world afterwards.”

“For the time being, I’m going to tell them not to go anywhere without one of us on hand to get them out of danger if it came,” Rias sighed, flying upstairs to speak with them.

“Something’s going on,” Mio fretted a little while earlier as she and Maria sat in her room. “We should have stayed down there.”

"If it's important, I trust them to tell us," the succubus shrugged. "You've been improving lately."

"I still barely ever land hits on you," Mio grumbled, making Maria chuckle.

"I've been fighting for a long time now, Mio," she replied softly. "You were never going to pick it up overnight. The fact is, though, that ever since we got here, your progress has picked up."

"I honestly think that just being able to sleep at night has made a world of difference," Mio sighed. "The first few weeks...all I could see or hear..."

"I know," Maria said softly, sitting next to her and wrapping an arm around her midback.

"I still have nightmares, but just knowing that those monsters aren't potentially lurking around every corner waiting to finish the job its been...it's helped a lot," Mio murmured. "I hate that I'm still so weak, though. You keep telling me that I have this tremendous power inside me, and half the demon realm wants to get their hands on me over it, and yet..."

"Tapping into it will take time," Maria sighed. "You do like it here, though, right?"

"It's starting to feel like home," Mio murmured. "I really don't like the idea of living on their dime for potentially months or even years on end, though."

"I'm paying off any debt you might think we're incurring with my help," Maria grinned.

"How is that going anyway?" Mio asked, making her grin widen.

"It's been a lot of fun," Maria purred, and Mio flinched out of her grasp.

"You're not...you know...are you?" the redhead asked.

"I've not joined in yet, if that's what you're asking," Maria giggled, leaning back on her hands.

"I don't know how all those girls are so willing to...share," Mio muttered.

"It's not like they're only sharing him," Maria explained, making her furrow her brow. "They're sharing each other too."

"That's...oh!" Mio exclaimed, her face turning scarlet at the thought.

"If you'd like a practical demonstration of how that works, I'd be happy to gi..." Maria went to say when Mio rushed over and clasped a hand over her mouth.

"Don't say things like that!" the redhead exclaimed, and Maria just laughed.

As Mio released her, the succubus said, "Even if they were just sharing him, they'd still be very happy. You should see him, Mio."

"Why did I ask?" she asked herself, shaking her head.

"Because you're curious," Maria purred. "I've seen the way you look at him."

"I do not!" Mio exclaimed.

“Please,” Maria chuckled. “Even if he weren’t an incubus, you’d have noticed him. Tall, broad-shouldered, square-jawed, and those eyes. He’d be hot even if he wasn’t hung like a...”

“Please stop talking,” Mio begged, sighing happily when a knock came to the door. “Come in!”

The door opened and Rias walked in, looking oddly conflicted.

“Is something wrong?” Maria asked.

“We learned why the girls from the church are in town, and it’s not good,” Rias replied. “You remember the swords we spoke about the other day when we were looking at the memory?”

“The holy swords,” Mio nodded.

“Specifically the excaliburs,” Rias replied. “There are seven of them, as I said, and it turns out that the reason those two are here is because three of the blades were stolen.”

“And they think they were brought here,” Maria said. “Do they think you did it?”

“No, they think that fallen angels did it, but...if that’s the case and they have come here, it’s entirely possible that they mean to attack us with them,” Rias replied. “I’ll be speaking with my brother later to see about improving security around here, and we will search extensively for the fallen angels so that we might deal with this quickly, but until that’s been taken care of, the town is not going to be as safe as it was.”

“I see,” Mio sighed. “What do you suggest?”

“For the foreseeable future, none of us are to go out alone,” Rias replied.

“I’ll stay by her side at all times,” Maria promised. “It won’t be the first time I’ve served as your bodyguard.”

“Actually, that’s the thing; I’d rather that you both enjoy the protection of someone who can teleport you out if needed,” Rias replied, and Maria’s face fell.

“Right,” the succubus murmured. “I can’t do that.”

“When it comes to getting to and from school, we’ll start teleporting from the Rookery and the club room at Kuoh Academy,” Rias said. “Otherwise, we’ll just have to make sure that we’re all being as careful as we can.”

“How long do you think this might go on for?” Mio asked.

“Hopefully not long,” Rias replied. “There is every chance that the person who stole the swords did so trying to foment conflict between us and the church, and in that case, they’re probably not terribly dangerous. If their aim is instead to come after us directly, they’re either delusional or they’re powerful enough to think they could, and that will be a far more dangerous position for us.”

“Could we hide out in the Underworld?” Mio asked. “You have been saying you’d show it to us.”

“That’s an option, but again, we don’t know how dangerous the situation actually is,” Rias replied. “We’re being cautious; hopefully we’re being overly cautious.”

“This isn’t a big town, so it’s not like you have too many places to search for your thieves,” Maria murmured. “If you want my help, I’ll be happy to.”

“Thank you for the offer, but our first course of action will be using the green minions to sweep the town,” Rias replied. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to see if I can contact my brother.”

“And things seemed so safe,” Mio sighed once she was out of earshot.

“No one’s ever fully safe,” Maria said. “That’s why its best to learn to fight and kill as needed.”

“Right,” Mio grumbled, wishing again that she was stronger than she was.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Harry asked as he spotted Kiba sitting on the roof of the Rookery, his legs dangling over the edge.

“Not really,” the blonde muttered.

Harry nodded and sat down next to him, looking out at the town below. The spot that they’d chosen for the Rookery was a small hill, and it was the tallest building in town by a significant measure, so from its roof, one could see pretty much everything there was to see nearby.

“Those two are just as arrogant as he was,” Kiba hissed after a moment.

“Sellzen?” Harry asked.

“Galilei,” Kiba replied, and Harry nodded. “I didn’t see it soon enough, but that absolute certainty that what he was doing was for the greater good...it let him justify anything. Those two would gut us all without a second thought if they thought they could.”

“They’re zealous and not entirely pleasant, but I didn’t see anything to suggest that they’re psychotic like the bishop and his men were,” Harry argued.

“Maybe not yet, but if they spend enough time like that, they’ll end up the same way,” Kiba muttered. “You can only go so long thinking that everything you could ever do would be justified because you serve a just and holy cause before it ruins you.”

Harry kept his mouth shut, not really agreeing with that but not wanting to argue further with him either just then.

“What happened that night, what they did...I have the knowledge of a murderous psychopath who killed countless people, and even by his standard that was up there,” he said and Kiba took a deep breath.

“Right,” the blonde murmured. “You were there.”

“I was,” Harry nodded. “I understand your anger; you know that I do.”

"I dream of them," Kiba whispered, not trusting his voice. "There were so many of us, bright-eyed and full of faith that what we were doing, what we were suffering, it was all worth it, all in the service of our loving god."

"We're still searching for Galilei," Harry replied. "If he's still alive, we'll find him eventually and you will have your revenge."

"I could tear out his throat with my teeth," Kiba growled. "I hate him so much that sometimes I can barely breathe."

"I know," Harry nodded, grasping his shoulder. "I know."

"Does it help?" Kiba asked. "They say it doesn't, but...you've gotten your revenge. You've killed your psychopath. Did it help you?"

"It did," Harry nodded. "It didn't at first, but that was because the same day I killed Voldemort, I learned that I had a far greater enemy out there. Now, though, as I think about him and all the suffering he caused, knowing that I put that son of a bitch down does help."

"If I tell you something and ask you to keep it to yourself, can I trust you to do that?" Kiba asked.

"Unless I think it might hurt the rest of us," Harry nodded.

"I want to destroy them," Kiba whispered. "We can use those two blind fools to help us track the swords down, but when we do...I want to destroy them."

"They might honestly prefer their destruction to letting them fall into the wrong hands," Harry murmured. When Kiba looked at him incredulously, he said, "I'd rather not start a wider conflict if we can avoid it, so if it becomes possible to sell that to them, I'd prefer to try. The excaliburs are the greatest of the holy swords and..."

"The reason why I and so many others were made to suffer and die by that lunatic and his men," the blonde muttered. "I can't bring them back, but if I could destroy the Excaliburs, I could get a measure of revenge."

"Keep in mind that they could be in the hands of someone we can't handle ourselves," Harry murmured.

"I understand that," Kiba said. "If possible, though..."

"This is a test," Harry thought to himself. "He wants to see if he truly can trust us entirely."

He mulled over the idea for a moment before saying, "If we get a good opportunity to destroy them, I won't stand in your way. Rias promised to wield you against our enemies the night she saved you, and she does keep her word."

"I didn't understand at the time why I lived longer than the others," Kiba murmured, conjuring a simple katana and holding it out against the air. "I know now that it was my sacred gear, and won't that be a terrible irony if a gift from the Tyrant himself is what helped me live long enough to become a devil and destroy some of his followers' greatest weapons?"

He smiled at that, his eyes going hollow as he remembered that night. He could still see them when he closed his eyes: Mark, Grace, little Tosca, and so many others. He'd lived where they died, and he owed them for that; he owed them their revenge, and if it killed him, he was going to get it for them. For his part, Harry just sat there in silence, hoping that his quiet presence would help his friend. Whoever was responsible for the theft of the Excaliburs, they were likely going to clash with them soon, and he could only hope that when they did, Kiba would manage to find some measure of peace in the process.

"We should give those two a transcript of Sellzen's confession," he murmured after a moment.

"Why?" Kiba asked, vanishing his blade.

"He might have mentioned something that meant little to us but they would recognize," Harry replied. *"If reading what he did in service of their church puts cracks in their faith, it might help make them more amenable to what you have in mind too."*

He didn't say that part, not wanting to give Kiba false hope, and so instead he flew down to make a copy of Sellzen's confession, figuring that, at minimum, there'd be little harm in sharing it.

"Remarkable," Galilei breathed as he watched two of his men spar, each one wielding an excalibur. "It worked, it actually worked."

"The sword isn't fighting me," Pietro grinned as he ducked under his opponent's slash and riposted towards his shoulder.

"Neither is mine," Marcus panted, already sounding like he was starting to tire. "It's incredible. I was never able to wield holy swords like this before."

"If only I had figured this out when I was still a young man," Galilei sighed, swirling the chianti around his glass before taking another sip.

How he'd longed as a boy to wield a holy sword in God's name. The legend of Excalibur had thrilled him when he was young, and learning that he was not one of the special few born in every generation who could wield such blades had been soul-crushing. He became a priest instead, dedicating his life to the service of God, and yet he never forgot his old obsession and over time, he met other like-minded figures in the church, some of whom helped him put together the Holy Sword Project after he became a bishop.

"Can this be done to anyo...agh!" Marcus gurgled as Pietro's blade sliced across his throat.

"Oops," the other warrior smirked, stepping out of range as Marcus swung at him wildly, falling to his knees.

"You shouldn't have tried to contact the Vatican, Marcus," Galilei murmured, smiling coldly as the other man looked at him in shock. "Nothing goes on around here without my knowledge, and your attempted communication was noticed immediately."

"I still say we should have just gutted him then and there," Pietro glared, and Galilei chuckled, standing up and plucking the crystallized holy element from Marcus' corpse.

“Killing people often serves a purpose, but I prefer, when possible, to make the deaths of others serve multiple purposes,” the former bishop murmured. “This was your last test, my friend, and you passed it well. You wield that blade like you were born to do so.”

“It’s incredible,” Pietro breathed, looking down at Excalibur Rapidly. “I’ve never known such power, and to be able to finally wield a blade like this...I owe you, Bishop.”

“The debt you owe me, you will repay with the blood of our enemies,” Galilei smiled, staring down at the crystal in his hand.

“Happily,” Pietro hissed. “When will we be moving out?”

“Soon,” Galilei replied. “My benefactor has a few more pieces to move into place before we can begin. Our revenge is close at hand.”

“Mine isn’t the only debt that will be paid in blood,” Pietro said darkly. “The church will regret rejecting me.”

“And with luck, this time around, the devils will be crushed completely,” Galilei said, scowling as he thought of the church. “Shortsighted, hypocritical fools. What I did for them has the potential to make the forces of heaven stronger than they’ve been at the height of the great war, and what was my reward? Excommunication, banishment, and disgrace and all because some little orphans ended up being the price of my success.”

“Blood is the currency of progress,” Pietro shrugged. “It has always been so, and their distaste at your methods didn’t stop the hypocrits from using your research.”

“No, it didn’t,” Galilei scowled. “We know that they’ve managed to create their own holy element crystals, and that means that you’ll be facing holy sword wielders no matter who they send to retrieve the blades.”

“As I just proved, even if their agents are wielding other Excaliburs, it won’t help them,” Pietro grinned, looking down at Marcus’ corpse and picking up Excalibur Nightmare.

“Leave both of those here,” Galilei murmured. “There are a couple tests I want to run on them.”

“Anything I should know about?” Pietro asked.

“Potentially, though you know I never discuss hypotheses until I’ve tested them,” Galilei replied. “I...”

He felt a chill go down his spine then as a being of such power, even a lowly mortal like him could feel it appeared in the corner of the room. He didn’t even need to turn around to know who was there, and yet he did so rapidly, kneeling before Kokabiel.

“Lord Kokabiel,” Galilei breathed. “This is unexpected.”

“Leave us,” Kokabiel commanded, looking at Pietro, who didn’t hesitate to leave the room. “Get up.”

“Everything is progressing on schedule,” Galilei reported. “The holy element crystals are working perfectly. With them, any human can be made capable of wielding holy swords. The fiends’ days are numbered, and they don’t even know it.”

“I wouldn’t bet on that last part,” Kokabiel rumbled. “Agents of the church have followed your trail, or rather, Freed Sellzen’s trail to Kuoh, Japan.”

“How I wish he were still here,” Galilei sighed. “Pietro D’Angelo will serve well but Sellzen...well, you know what he was. I can’t believe a lowly devil managed to kill him.”

“The devils that have infested that town are not to be underestimated,” Kokabiel said, looking down at the corpse in the middle of the room. “Training accident?”

“A spy I put to good use,” Galilei replied. “He didn’t get anything useful out to the church before I had him dealt with. About the excaliburs...”

“I gave some thought to your idea of merging them together, and I don’t think that doing so with just three of them would work,” Kokabiel said. “Luckily for you, the church has seen fit to send at least one more of them to us.”

“They gave one of their agents an excalibur to wield?” Galilei asked.

“They’re desperate,” Kokabiel replied, “and desperate enemies are often the most entertaining kind. You are to move this entire operation to Kuoh and deal with those two by any means necessary. If you secure the other blade, it should become far simpler to merge them together. Do you think that exorcist there could wield such power?”

“I do,” Galilei replied.

“Good,” Kokabiel grinned. “Once you’re in Kuoh, contact my people and we’ll move to the next phase.”

“After months of plotting, we’re finally ready to light this fire,” Galilei breathed.

“The fire we’re going to light will envelop everything,” Kokabiel rumbled. After centuries of revolting half-peace, the war they never finished properly was finally going to start up again, even if he had to drag everyone else kicking and screaming into it.

“The place is empty and was cleaned so thoroughly; you’d honestly not know anyone had been there recently,” Grayfia announced as she stepped into the Rookery.

“I can’t say I’m surprised, but still, thank you for checking,” Rias sighed. “Do you think Azazel could be the one behind the theft of the excaliburs?”

“I honestly doubt it,” Grayfia replied. “I fought against him more than once back in the day, and I never knew him to be particularly enthusiastic about battle. He’s powerful and a right terror when he chooses to fight, but he never struck me as someone who particularly enjoyed it, and according to Sirzechs, his efforts to establish a lasting peace treaty between the factions have seemed very genuine.”

“And yet he reached out to Harry in the guise of a simple human,” Rias muttered.

“He did seem to just be curious about me,” Harry murmured as he joined them.

“Drinking with him was foolish,” Grayfia chided, and he winced.

“I know,” Harry sighed. “It was supposed to be one drink, but it was really good sake, and he was a really engaging storyteller and...yeah, I get it was stupid.”

“We will be expressing to him that we’re less than impressed with his actions,” Grayfia murmured. “In the meantime, though, he does seem to have left Kuoh.”

“It’s possible that he was the fallen angel that Xenovia and Irina detected, and if he isn’t actually connected to the theft, they could be barking up the wrong tree entirely,” Harry pointed out.

“That matter is one that we’re all taking very seriously,” Grayfia said. “We reached out to Michael to offer our help, but Heaven is treating this as an internal matter to be handled themse...”

She trailed off, her eyes going wide as Mio walked down the stairs.

“Hello,” the redhead said as she spotted her. “Who’s this?”

“Mio, this is my sister-in-law, Grayfia,” Rias replied. “Grayfia, this is...”

“Uncanny,” Grayfia breathed, looking the diminutive yet curvaceous redhead who looked disturbingly like Rias up and down.

“Yeah, I’ve been getting that a lot,” Mio sighed. “It’s not like we’re twins or anything. She’s half a foot taller than me, and we have completely different eye colors.”

“Yeah, her eyes are honestly closer to yours, Grayfia,” Harry chuckled, and the silver-haired devil took a deep breath.

“*She looks like Rias and has eyes like mine,*” she thought to herself. “*No, no, none of that.*”

“Harry, it’s been a while since I last tested your progress,” Grayfia said flatly. “Let’s spar.”

“Okay,” Harry replied. “The training room has been magically reinforced since last time, so we should be good.”

“Excellent,” Grayfia nodded. “Lead the way.”

As he flew off towards the training room and she followed after him, the silver-haired woman thought to herself, “*If he has made any significant progress at all, I could use that to justify suggesting that he seduce Mio as well for the additional power boost. One way or another, I need that girl to become part of his and Rias’ harem as soon as possible.*”

Shaking her head at that, she put it out of her mind, suddenly more grateful than she’d been in her entire life for how busy her husband always was.