

Before I Go

‘They are rioting in the market square, sire.’

Narrowing my eyes, I brushed past the messenger to start my walk down the desolate corridors.

Deep red carpet, diamond filled chandeliers, towering windows and exotic paintings. All expensive, beautiful, but all useless against a mob of citizens out for guilty blood.

Ignorant, mindless robots, I thought while carding a hand through my tangled locks. They just had to trust that fool.

One of few servants came bustling through the corridor. Her eyes widened as she caught my gaze, ‘my Lord.’ A delicate hand was placed over her chest as she caught her breath.

‘My dear, why are you running around the palace in such a manner? Don’t say it is due to the people’s unrest,’ I tsked, placing a gentle hand upon her shoulder. ‘That is no excuse to scuff the carpets and cause a ruckus.’

‘But what are we going to do my Lord?’ She started to worry her lip. ‘They will not stop until they have your head.’ Patting gently, I started to guide her along.

‘Well, I do hope you refrain from offering it on a silver platter,’ I chuckled lightly.

The servant gasped, ‘my Lord, please this is no laughing matter. You need to flee the castle.’

I flashed her an easy smile, ‘If I am to flee, I would rather leave through my own front door. Do you not agree?’ This at least stifled her next plea.

Rounding a corner, I could clearly hear the thunderous pounding emitting from the entrance hall. Knowing my plan had to be put into action, I finally released the servant. ‘Now, my dear, if you really want to assist me, would you so kindly go into my office and retrieve a sealed envelope?’

‘Whatever for?’ she interrupted with a small frown.

‘I would like you to personally deliver it to the current Duke of Ellington. It is in the top draw. Here is the key, and I do hope you understand the importance of this task, dear.’

She nodded her head with vigor.

‘Good,’ I shooed her towards the west wing, ‘now go, it will be a good ride towards the northern border, so make sure to pack well.’

She hurried along, muttering her prayers of good fortune as she went. Nodding once, I reassured myself of my decision.

‘Right.’ Now, to confront the people’s problematic spokesperson.

I walked with a skip in my step. The crowd’s roars of protest echoed through the palace as I neared the throne room.

‘Sire.’ A voice greeted me from the right of my lone seat.

‘Sebastian,’ I sighed. ‘You should be leaving with your family.’

He looked at me knowingly. ‘Sire, I already sent a messenger to warn my wife. They will be fine, unlike you.’

‘You have always been like a brother to me, and I thank you dearly for your service, but you know they will skin you while living.’ He grimaced. ‘Your family may not need you right now, but they will in a month’s time. Go to them, or you will most likely never see them again.’

He walked down from his station with a resigned sigh. He was just a head taller, always had been, but still he looked up to me like I was some greater being with boundless amounts of wisdom and experience.

‘Ammon, know that you have always been what this country needs. No matter what they think now, every single one of them will regret going against you.’ His green eyes shone in the dying light. ‘Nothing will shadow your triumphs, and no one will forget the fortunes you gave to us all.’

Silent tears gathered in his eyes, threatening to roll down his reddened cheeks. ‘I will always stand by your side. Until my time, please wait for me.’

Sebastian placed a hand between us. Grasping it, I put my endless gratitude into the single gesture, ‘you always have been the strongest of us both.’ I whispered, struggling to keep my voice smooth. ‘and I will wait longer than eternity for you.’

I let go and he walked steadily out of the room without a look back. His steps echoed through the halls, before the cries of unrest drowned out his escape.

I cleared my throat and straightened my shirt. Breathing deeply, I mentally prepared before taking a seat at my throne.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

It sounded louder than anytime previously. Thinking of it now, it reminded me of the hanging bell. It rang aloud before an execution was commenced in some foreign town. Disgust would grow inside me, watching as people from all backgrounds walked in the midday sun to accept their demise. Citizens would cheer and leer at the lowered heads, like they were any better, any different.

A crash resounded through the palace, pulling me from my thoughts. Voices built upon each other, all shouting ‘damn the Lord! The devil from hell!’ over and over through the empty palace. Under my throne, I reached for my heavy crown and placed it atop my head. I slouched down, feigning indifference as the city came for my confession.

Finally, the carved doors gave way to my demise. My people paused, in step and chant, when they caught sight of their Lord sitting still and patient. I smiled down as people, young and old, strong and frail, filled the large room. Not everyone could fit and some stood just outside the doors, desperate to see what would happen.

One person, the leader, stepped out of the crowd. His bronze hair caught the fading light. His chocolate eyes held my attention like so many times before. His voice deep and alluring, charming all those that were graced enough to hear.

‘Lord Neredras,’ he greeted, ‘what a pleasure it is for you to be with us today.’

Like it was I who marched through the streets, I who climbed the palace steps, I who chanted my lover’s demise for all to hear.

‘I would wish to be nowhere else, darling.’

He cleared his throat, ‘You should know why we are here. You should know what ruin you have caused these people you call your own. All the lies you have spat at our feet; you are a fool to think we would not come to stop your reign of venality.’

I allowed silence to fall before applauding with a smirk, ‘well done, love. You truly have turned everyone against me. My personal staff, the people I swore to protect, even the capital sent a letter of disgust my way.’ I stood up and gazed around the room, letting a weak smile morph my features.

'I lied to everyone; I will never deny that. But I also gave everything away so you would all prosper. I tried to be the leader you all deserved, the advisor you all required. I guess, though, in the end, it only takes one lie to question every truth.'

'You should have been smarter, wiser.'

I locked my gaze back to his. 'Everyone hates me.' Something clenched deep from within as the truth left me.

'They all hate me because I loved you.' I let a tear roll free. 'Tell me, darling, how can anyone be wise in the face of such an emotion.'

A sneer broke out across his face, but his eyes darted to the marble floor. 'You did not love me, you tricked and deceived me. My life, my future. All of it ruined by your hands.'

'Henry, we both know that was never-

'You went against the nation and joined hands with the devil below, so now you shall pay the consequences of your crimes.' He raised his arms, allowing his voice to ring through the room.

That alone was enough to rile everyone back up; those close enough to hear every word, and those too far to witness a thing.

'Hang him!' they shouted, 'Hang the traitor!'

A chain was put into hand before Henry walked towards me. He came up close, staring at me with a spiteful look.

'Just one more thing, before I go.' I whispered, offering my bare wrists.

'What?'

'My name, please say it one last time.'

His eyes narrowed as cold metal clasped against my skin. 'Ammon Neredras.'

I shook my head, a small smile spilling across my lips. 'My actual name.'

With a scowl, he leaned in closer without breaking my gaze, barely murmuring above his breath. A smile grew when the last syllable fell from his lips.

Gradually, small bulbs of white light appeared around us. Henry stumbled down the steps, his gorgeous eyes wide as a circle singed itself into the precious marble.

Gasps echoed around but my attention stayed with him.

'How?' Henry muttered, 'you knew... but magik's a forbidden practice here.'

'Sorry I never said love, but I just couldn't help but dabble in the arts.' I waved vaguely at the increasing bulbs.

'No, no, no' he began to cuss. 'Damn you, Ammon!' He ran forward. 'Why do you always have to win? Why cannot you just give up for once?' he snarled at me, grabbing at my front.

I could feel a tug as the space around me began to warp. Twisting us around, I pushed him on to the throne.

'Maybe next time, Henry.' I cupped his jaw and placed a kiss atop his temple before I placed the heavy crown over his head and stood up straight.

A brilliant light shone, but my executioner's tearful expression was what truly blinded me.

In place of my people, the Melded Forest appeared. Rustling leaves and startled birds filled my ears as a throbbing began to set in behind my eyes.

'Maybe next time,' I promised, against the settling breeze.

Straightening my shirt, I walked calmly into the forest. The war was only just starting, and yet I was as good as hanged.

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