

'Then why do you always cancel on me?' Marie doesn't give up.

'Because I also have my duties,' Liam replies. Marie looks at his chest, refusing to meet his eye.

'I'm sorry, okay,' Marie stays stubborn. Liam pulls his hand from hers and tilts her head. 'I'm sorry, I will see you soon enough, okay?'

Marie looks at him and reluctantly nods. Liam lets go of her head and continues dancing. He wasn't lying; he really misses their secret dates. The moonlight picnics, the midnight horse rides.

She just isn't of noble blood. His father wouldn't approve and what his father says goes.

Liam would love to go against his father; if he could, he would. Three more years, he thinks, when I am King, I will decide.

The music stops, and so does the dance. He bows and Marie curtsies. He looks at Ryan and Eliza, to see Ryan bow, and Eliza just stand there like she is royalty herself.

'Lizz, you have to curtsy,' Marie says. Liam hadn't taken on the nickname himself.

'Not the ball yet,' Eliza simply replies.

'I am the prince and even I bow', Liam says trying to help Marie.

Eliza simply walks to Marie. 'Please get me out of this dress.' Marie looks over Eliza's shoulder at Ryan.

'How did she do?' she asks.

Ryan nods. 'Great, almost like she's done it before'.

'I'm a fast learner,' Eliza says without looking back. Marie pulls her out of the ballroom. Liam watches her go.

'What is next Ryan?' he asks.

'Training session,' Ryan replies. 'I'll train with you since Lizz is busy.' Liam nods and walks out of the room.

After their warmup, they both grab swords and start working on that.

A few of Ryan's blows hit so hard, Liam had to handle the sword with two hands to block his hits. He is focused and skilled.

Liam would never admit it, but he is better than him.

He blocks yet another blow, this time he can't hold it. He loses his balance and falls to the floor. Ryan offers him a hand, and he takes it.

'It is very different training with you than with Eliza,' Liam says.

'Oh yeah? How?' Ryan asks. 'Does she let you win?' Liam laughs. Eliza would rather carve out her own eyes than let him win.

'No, absolutely not.' They take their positions again.

'Am I better than her then?' Ryan asks in a cocky tone.



'Also, no,' Liam replies. 'You do insult me a lot less than she does.'

Ryan laughs aloud.

Liam laughs along with him. 'I once told her she didn't have to train me because I knew she hated me. She replied that it was okay, and she needed an excuse to punch me anyway.'

Despite his laughter, Ryan manages to block Liam's blow.

'That's one of her less detailed ones,' he says. 'She once told me to shut up or she would make me eat my own eyeballs.' Ryan laughs again.

It's quiet for a second after that, until Ryan speaks again, 'Can I ask you something?'

'Of course,' Liam replies.

'What is going on with you and Marie?' Ryan strikes, and because of his shock, Liam forgets to block.

'What are you talking about?'

Ryan scoffs, 'You really think I don't notice? You don't get a lot of sleep, you always look at her, and don't try to fool me with that little notebook. We both know it's just full of drawings of her.'

He may have asked if he could ask a question, but right now, he was challenging Liam.

They both know everything he said was true, and Liam knows he could go to his father about it.

That's why he steps closer to him and whispers, 'Tell anyone and I will have your head.'

Ryan doesn't back down. 'Relax, I wouldn't do that to Marie. She does deserve better than you, though.'

Liam steps back and sighs, 'I know, but I don't have a choice.'

They get through the rest of the training session without talking.



Lizz

The noble Lord of Belim had been the victim this time. His murder more brutal than normal, with his eyes rolling over the floor, strips of his skin lying all around the room, and his ears missing, as well as a few of his fingers.

'Dear Ares,' one of the King's men mutters behind her. He always insisted on her taking some along. Why? She doesn't know.

'Weak stomach?' Lizz asks, half mockingly. She looks over her shoulder. The poor man indeed looks like he's about to throw up.



'You don't?' he asks her.
She shrugs. 'You get used to it'.
'Do you need a long time?' the other man asks. He's a bit older than the other one and had come with her before.
'You getting sick too?' Lizz asks sweetly.
'None of the kills have been this brutal,' is all she gets in reply.
'Yeah, well,' Lizz looks down at the corpse. 'Maybe she thought he deserved it.'
'Why are you so certain it's a she?' the younger one asks, sounding like he's about to throw up.
'I'll explain that later,' Lizz promises, 'when I tell the King.'
The carpet is crusted with blood. The body is already in full rigor mortis, but it hasn't started to rot yet.
That gives Lizz a bit of a timeframe for when the murder could have happened.
She adjusts the strap of her bag over her shoulder and turns around to the men.
'I have everything I need,' she declares. 'Let's go.' She walks past them out of the mansion.

