**Ace 2-09**

The next message I received from ‘Councilor Medarda’ was not yet another request for special privileges.

No, it was a *demand.*

My presence was ‘requested’ in my own office, and, when I laughed, and told the messenger I’d drop by *Mel’s* office that afternoon, I received another message, an hour later, demanding that I head to my office directly or *‘suffer the consequences’*.

Given the *actual* Medarda Councilor, whose office was much closer than mine in the Hexgate building to my Academy Lab, had already received *my* message and penned me one asking me to come down in a few minutes so she could ‘deal with this’, I’d decided to head over to the Hexgate. Piper stayed behind with Victor, much to her disappointment, and, shrugging on my jacket, I’d gestured for the Medarda courier, who did not leave, but *led me to my office,* which… *rude.*

“-pletely overstepped my position with this stunt!” I heard Mel exclaim from my office’s mostly closed door, the Medarda messenger hesitating, so I pat the young man on the back as I walked past him, opening what should have been the *locked* door, and into the argument.

“It is *you* who are overstepping, ‘Councilor’, and-” a middle-aged man, on the swarthier side of Caucasian, and wearing a red and gold outfit bearing the shielded compass of Clan Medarda, turned to look at me. “Oh. Good. You’ve finally arrived, *boy.*”

*Ooooh, this isn’t gonna go the way you want,* I thought, as I deliberately turned towards the dark-skinned woman who looked at me sourly, likely having hoped to have this entire thing sorted by now.

*“Mel!”* I greeted her warmly. “I got the *strangest* letters from you, so I decided to come investigate, and who let you into my office?”

“That was me, *Nozoral Medarda*, and you would do well to treat me with the respect I deserve!” the interloper glowered, upset at being ignored.

*God this man has skin the strength of tissue paper.*

He continued, “And Medarda funds created this building, so of *course* we may go where we please!”

I paused, smile fixed, as there was just… *sooo* much wrong with that statement.

“Well, Mr. Medarda,” I stated, walking around them and sitting at my desk, taking a moment to pop open a drawer, and… yep, someone had unlocked it and rifled through my papers, not even bothering to put them away properly. *Time to invest in some stronger security measures.* Waving to the chairs across the way, I asked, “Who *are* you, as we have never met, and I, of course, wish to make sure I do give you *proper* respect? Mel’s a Councilor of our fine city, but you are…?”

At Mel’s sharp glance my way, I realized that I probably let a bit *too* much of my annoyance into my tone, as this ‘Nozoral’ remained standing, likely to better look down his nose at me, and stated, “I’m someone with *actual* power, not some half-breed.”

I blinked, as, for all that I was aware, Racism wasn’t really a… *thing* here, as I echoed, “Half-breed?”

“Pff, how *ignorant* you are, boy,” the man sneered. “Do you know who her *mother* is?”

“Ambessa Medarda, Noxian Warlord… Warlady? Person of high statehood by means of martial competency, as they do over there,” I supplied, glancing the Councilor’s way, as she cast a wary look at me in return, and I realized she might’ve thought her parentage was a *secret.* “It appears the apple has fallen *very* far from the tree,” I offered, trying to compliment her, which just made the woman look confused, and mildly offended, then instantly *surprised* at her own offense, before her expression smoothed out into an unreadability poker face, the woman good but nowhere near *Mrs. Kiramman’s* level.

*“Exactly!”* the Medarda male stated, seemingly ignorant of the byplay. “She’s not of *proper* stock like you or I!”

*Ah, so not race-racist, but national-racist. Fair enough.*

“Then why not deal with me *directly*, as I assume the missives I have been receiving have been from you. Why go through her office?” I questioned, honestly confused.

Looking to *him* for answers actually calmed the intruder down, and soothed his ego, as the asshole smugly stated, “Ah, but it came from the Medarda Council seat, and I *am* a Medarda. The girl is merely the… *speaker* on our behalf.”

Offended, Mel grit out, “I am *much* more than a ‘speaker’, Nozoral, I am-”

“Please, the *adults* are talking,” the older Medarda stated condescendingly. “There’s no need for you to be here. You may leave,” he waved towards the door.

The Councilor’s nostrils flared in anger, but before she could continue, as I *did* want to find out *what the actual fuck,* I lifted a finger, “Ah, actually, given previous confusions, perhaps she should stay, just so we’re all on the same page, as I was under the impression that your letters were coming from *her.* Given that they bore the seal she uses, came on the paper she uses, and so on.”

Considering that, the Medarda Noble admitted, “I suppose, as long as she remains *quiet*. It explains the *foolishly rude* tone of some of your responses, at least.”

Mel looked *pissed,* but, as the man imperiously ran a hand over his over-coiffed hair, which looked as if it had started to thin, I winked at her, which put her off long enough for the man to continue.

“You’ve done quite well here, Talis, but you seem to have forgotten your place in things,” the older Clan-member drawled, waving in Mel’s general direction as he added, “though you aren’t the only one. No, the Medardas *own* this city, and to treat us like the, the *common rabble*? *Unthinkable.*”

“Ah,” I replied. “I was under the impression that the *Kirammans* owned more property than anyone else in Piltover. Was I informed incorrectly?”

With a sneer, Nozoral commented, “*Those renters?* Please, those scattered ‘landlords’ may *think* they are important, but *we* enforce the contracts they rely on. Or don’t.”

Lifting an eyebrow, subtly, looking to Mel for confirmation, the woman sighed, shaking her head no, as I slowly stated, “Well, alright, but Clan Medarda is *already* receiving preferential treatment, and if I’m going to pay *back* the loans I took from you in order to build, the Hexgates, I need to make a profit, hence why I have ameliorated some of your more extreme… *requests.* We’re making maintenance payments on the debt, but-”

“Oh, don’t bother with those,” the man interrupted.

“I… what?” I questioned, hoping that he wouldn’t be *that stupid.*

However, my hopes were in vain.

Nozoral, with a dismissive wave, stated, “Those don’t matter. Just continue to dutifully serve Clan Medarda’s interests, and you will have no need to worry about such small things like that.”

*And, the second I don’t, or even balk at one of your increasingly idiotic and asinine requests, and not only will you call in your debt, you’ll call in* ***all of the interest it has accrued as well.***

From the glance I cast towards the Councilor, she was as taken aback by the *sheer stupidity* of the man as I was, perhaps more, akin to someone expecting a martial duel with another practitioner of your art, only for them to charge at you, full of openings, screaming about their victory.

“Yes, with the money you save, I’m sure that giving us our due won’t be an issue,” the Medarda blue-blood smiled.

I stared at the idiotic main. “I… Are you aware that I am an apprenta of House *Kiramman?* That I am good friends with Councilor Kiramman’s daughter, and regularly meet with the Kiramman Matriarch?”

The man’s blank stare, partly bored, partly annoyed, screamed ‘Yes? And?’, as he clearly waited for me to *get to the point.*

Sighing, I dropped my hand below my desk, and Mel stiffened, but I was just hitting the lever I built into my chair, allowing it to spin as I turned to face away from the man, out the floor to nearly ceiling windows I’d installed in it. One of the panels secretly held a latch that could be flipped from either side, allowing it to swing out, if I ever needed to leave in a hurry, or arrive similarly, using my hoverboard, which would likely be attention getting, but less so then if I had to *shatter my own window* to pass through it.

“Also, Caitlyn, at her mother’s insistence, has been giving me an education in Piltovan high society history and functionality, the things that, spending my time in a lab in the Academy, I’ve missed,” I mused, trying to emphasize my connection to the family, which got me a measuring look from the Councilor, but mere boredom from the intruder. “For instance, while House Kiramman’s residential purchases were made near centers of commerce, industry, and population, to pre-emptively secure in-demand real estate, continuing this trend throughout Piltover’s history, House Medarda chose to base themselves quite far away from the metropolitan center of our city.”

“Is there a *point* to this?” Nozoral drawled.

“There is,” I stated, looking outward, as, while not the center of the view by any stretch of the imagination, his clan’s compound could be easily seen. “They secured the sizeable placement of land quite easily, and, other than a few fortified locations, such as the Sun Gates, their banks, or the original Enforcer barracks, they kept to themselves, creating their own little miniature city-state, separate from Piltover. Ironically, though she didn’t realize it, your family attempted to do to Piltover what Piltover did to *Zaun*.”

Glancing backwards, I could tell neither of them had any idea what I was referring to, so I shrugged, and continued, “Regardless-”

“I didn’t come here for a *lesson*, boy,” Nozoral interrupted.

“No, you came to here to give me *orders*, but, well, I’m a member of the Academy, **and *that’s how we do things,***” I replied indulgently, my supernatural ability leaking into my tone in my anger. “Regardless, that has clearly isolated you, putting you out of touch with Piltover as a whole. Which is why you are going to be so confused, and offended, when I tell you ***no, I will not do as you demand.***”

The older man glared at me, and stated through clenched teeth, “Making an enemy of me could be *quite dangerous*.”

“Oh, what a coincidence!” I smiled, baring my own in turn. “***Same!****”*

“The Medardas *rule* this city, *boy!*” Nozoral declared hotly.

Mel looked at the man in dismayed surprise, as I’m sure they said such things to each *other* in their compound, but to do so *publicly?*

“No. **They *don’t,***” I informed him placidly. “They are one of *seven* ruling families. Five point four, given Bolbok’s the speaker of a conglomerate, and Heimerdinger is *Heimerdinger*. And you no more rule Piltover than the Kirammans, ***my sworn patrons*,** do.”

Pulling himself up to his… not terribly impressive height, the Clanner stated “Do you know what happens to those who cross the Medardas, *boy?”*

“No, but I’m sure you’ll tell me?” I smiled.

“They do not *live for long!”* he yelled. “Or those that do, *wish they hadn’t!”*

Mel couldn’t hold back, and stepped forward, “That’s *enough* Nozoral. *I* am the one who speaks for the Medardas, *not you,* and I will *not* have you threatening a *Medarda asset* who has been *more* than reasonable considering your *outlandish* demands. And to threaten him like a, like a *common thug*? Have you no *shame?”*

“Yes, yes, you’re *so* important,” sneered the man, before he looked my way. “Wish to reconsider your position, *boy?* For a twenty thousand gold, I *may* overlook your impertinence.”

This was so beyond the pale for what Caitlyn and Mrs. Kiramman had prepared me for, I fell back on my old training.

And *laughed.*

Deep and long, I had to wipe away a tear, as the man looked *mortally* offended, yet nothing short of complete capitulation would work with someone like this, and I *already* served enough masters already. “I’m sorry, you threaten my life, and now you seek to *rob* me? You asked me if I knew who you were, Nozoral of Clan Medarda, but you went out of your way to *hide who you were*, so, quite frankly, ***I don’t care.*** **If you wished to discuss things, like Councilor Medarda does, I would be amenable,** but if you wish to do things in the *old* ways…”

I looked back towards the distant Medarda compound. “In that case, it’s so *considerate* of you to have made sure to place yourself in such a manner as to *minimize civilian casualties.*”

*“Jayce!”* Mel gasped, and I cast a curious gaze her way.

“Ms. Medarda, **I would prefer to do things your way,** but, as this man claims that *you* have no authority, I am merely stating that such a confrontation **would not end favorably for him,**” I informed her. “I *am* a student of history, in addition to science, and, historically speaking, if one gives into threats, all that ensures is that *more threats will be used.*”

Turning to stare at the absolutely *incensed* man, I smiled broadly. “After all, there’s a *reason* that the Kirammans are all proficient sharpshooters. Now, would **you like to deal with me, as I am, with the backing of a Great House *equal to your own*,** or would you like to *waste my fucking time some more?”*

This time it was Nozoral who took several seconds to respond, before finally declaring, levelling an accusatory finger in my direction, “You’ve made an enemy today, *boy!”*

“You demand I do whatever you want, or else. ***You were already my enemy, Nozoral Medarda,****”* I informed him. “Today you just decided to come out of *hiding*. Now, **take this as the loss it is**, and ***leave me alone.***”

*“This won’t end here!”* the idiot announced, determined to get the last word, and stormed out.

There was a moment of silence, before Mel stated, “Mr. Talis, that was… not well done.”

“Indeed,” I agreed, knowing what she meant me, but turned her statement around, “Were someone to inform my patron that she was ‘overstepping’, had no power in the city she co-rules, and should sit down and be quiet, she either would have torn strips off of them, or made sure to *ruin* them for attempting to attack her position in society. You informed me you were going to take care of it, only for me to find the person responsible had *openly broken into my office.* **Tell me**, because I must be missing something, but what kind of message would it send if *I* demanded your presence, and, upon arriving, found that I had not only *broken into your office,* but,” I re-opened a drawer and lifted some files, up, placing them on the table, “had *clearly* rifled through your private belongings?”

“I would-” the dark-skinned woman started to reply, then cut herself off. “I’m sorry, he *what?*”

I gestured for her to come over, and, after a moment’s hesitation, she did so. I laid the files out, seeing no reason not to inform *her* that, “I divide my documentation by category, alphabetically. However, I don’t *label* them as such, so when Nozoral went to put things away, he did so by a system that likely made sense to *him*, grouping together Hexgate material expenses together with Hexgate governmental payments, when they *should* be in Building and Taxes, with Personnel costs,” I reached down and pulled out a different folder, “before Taxes, and *this* folder full of *Records* of ships and cargos,” I pulled out another, “Also coming after, when, it should have been filed *before* Taxes, yet here it is. Mind you these are all just copies, and I’ll *absolutely* be having someone go through this to see if he’s pulled a key file or three.”

It was the standardized system of my sub^nth-department of The Company, but one which, on something as small as the Hexgate, would have been unnecessarily clunky, as it didn’t really start to shine until one had access to computerized systems dealing with a *nation’s* worth of records.

But it confused the fuck out of the locals, which, itself, was *kind of the point.*

“Also, he put a few in *backwards*,” I sighed, pulling out more folders, and just sighing, as I apparently *didn’t need the fancy system.* “So, given that we *both* know that, despite his *clearly* committing a crime, due to his position the Enforcers will do *nothing*, **what are *you* going to do to handle this, Councilor Medarda?** Because ***I really don’t want to be the one who handles this.*** I am both *not* a member of a great house, and will not be listened to by the others because of that, not that Nozoral seems to care about anyone *other* than the Medardas.”

Something I said made the woman frown, Mel standing up straight and stating, imperiously, “I am a *Councilor*, Mr. Talis, and as such are not answerable to *you.*”

*Ah, so you found your spine after it was no longer helpful,* I couldn’t help but think, instead sighing, knowing not to try to turn this into a pissing match, because, while I *could absolutely win,* all of Piltover would be in the splash zone.

“Ah, yes, so when should I expect to receive confirmation of the forgiveness or repayment of the Medarda debt?” I inquired instead. At her confused look, I prompted, “You stated if you could not handle this, you would negate the debt yourself. Thus I am asking **what you are going to do to handle this**, ***so I do not accidentally get in your way*.** And, if not, then when I can expect to be freed of the connection that your fellow clansman seeks to turn into a *collared leash.*”

The woman did not answer, possibly trying to figure out the answer *herself,* and, if I gave her time, she’d likely respond, probably *not* in a way that I liked, so, having established that *something needed to be done* and that *she was the one that needed to do it*, it was time to shift topics, so I turned away, looked out over the city, and sighed, commenting, “You know, I didn’t need to stay.”

“I, what?” the woman questioned, as off-balance by the seeming non-sequitor as I wanted her to be.

“Back when my apartment exploded. Clan *Kiramman’s* apartment that I was using at the time,” I amended. “I’d done all the research I really needed. Viktor helped, and has been invaluable since then, but I very much could have done as Heimerdinger asked, not mentioned my studies, and taken the pseudo-exile that would’ve likely been suggested. And then, with the exception of *Freljord*, I could’ve written my own ticket.” I glanced back her way, “But I didn’t.”

“You would… leave?” the diplomat inquired. “But, what about your family?”

“I’m a branch house member of a minor clan,” I smiled. “While it does give me some privileges, to those such as Nozoral, I might as well be an Undercity urchin. If I established myself somewhere else, and sent back funds, they’d understand, and even possibly appreciate me. I had everything I needed to get started. Bilgewater? While it wouldn’t be so great as this building,” I waved around us, “the Hexgate I could build there it would be serviceable, and a hextech *ship* wouldn’t be beyond the realm of possibly.”

Interested, seemingly despite herself, Mel pressed, “And Shurima? Damacia? *Noxus?”*

“Well, Shurima is *where* I source the Hexcrystals, so that’d shorten the logistics, and, while it would take more work, I’d also have the opportunity to try and build a Hextech *city,”* I mused. “Damacia would be an even easier sell than Piltover had been, as they *despise* Mages, so giving them the power denied to them…” I shrugged. “And Noxus…” I glanced her way. “It is *much* easier to destroy than it is to create, and, while **I would like to avoid such a scenario**, there would be a market for such things. But I didn’t. **I stayed.**”

“Because you believe in the purpose of Piltover,” the Councilor stated, echoing my earlier words.

“Because the logistical chain is easiest here, and finding people who can follow directions and produce high quality standardized products is simpler,” I stated instead, counting off on one finger.

The second was, “Because **I owed House Kiramman a debt** for supporting me and **I wished to repay that debt.**”

And then the third. “And because, yes, **I believe in the purpose of Piltover, the City of Progress**, and **wish to contribute to its greatness**. As **I believe the Councilors do**. As House Kiramman does. As I *thought* that House Medarda did. Piltover is a place where if one works hard, they can succeed. A place of laws, of fairness, and of peace. A place where, yes, some Houses are above others, but where if one is smart enough, dedicated enough, and one follows our ways, then they can rise and be rewarded for their work.”

With a gesture towards the door, I finished, “But, ‘Do what I want *or I’ll kill you?*’ Why, that’s almost *Noxian* in its approach, and there’s *many* reasons I am here, and not *there*. So, *Councilor Medarda*, I am asking you, *as a person under the protection of House Kiramman*, if you are going to seek to solve this problem within your own clan, or if I should, as is expected of me, go to Mrs. Kiramman and ask for *her* assistance, turning this into an *intra-House conflict?* Because **I would really rather the problem *went away*** and **I could go back to *inventing things and making Piltover gobs of money*** instead of having to deal with you Clansman’s attempts at extortion.”

Watching the woman, doing the political equivalent of asking her to ‘put up or shut up’, it *was* a bit much, but what someone under *her* aegis did was the equivalent of a declaration of *war*, so there was really no way for her to come out of this looking good. Now, her position *was* above mine, and she *could* try and do the standard bully move of ‘shit rolls downhill’ and try to ‘put me in my place’ after being embarrassed like she was by the Medarda man’s actions, but not only would any submission I *could* show at this point be a blatant lie, I very clearly had shown that doing so would be akin to punching a porcupine, and about as effective.

“You were not like this when we met before, Mr. Talis,” she finally declared.

“Councilor Medarda, I have spent a lot of time out on research trips, and, were I to act like your average Piltovan noble, I likely would have *died* on them*,*” I stated, with a hint of ruefulness. It was meant to be taken in response to some sort of action I had taken during them, but was in actuality due to the fact that, falling upon my *anti-Fey* training, I’d let the mask slip a little. However, one of the many skills required to being a *journeyman* manipulator was to display real emotions, and then allow others to believe them to be sourced in the cause you *wished* them to believe they sprang from, as opposed to where they came in truth.

“I would rather be the person you met previously, though under better circumstances,” I smiled slightly, “and did not expect to meet that sort of situation here, especially not in my own office. So…?”

Given more time to think, while I also provided another rush of verbiage to help cover my ‘offense’, complete with ‘insight’ into my history, the woman gathered herself, and informed me. “Do not worry… *Jayce.* I will make sure this is the end of this. Will you be still granting House Medarda the privileges you were before?”

“For *you?* Yes, Mel, I will,” I agreed, easily, her more familiar address a good sign here, as the woman was quickly getting her diplomatic feet under her, her Clansman’s action so openly confrontation and in-your-face I wouldn’t be surprised if she’d momentarily had a flashback to a childhood memory. “Though if you need to use the *removal* of such as a cudgel to smack Nozoral amongst the metaphorical head and shoulders, I can pause them if you wish.”

Which got me a bit of a queer look, though I wasn’t entirely sure *why*, unless… Maybe she took my antagonism towards Nozoral as against House Medarda as a whole? Regardless, with another slight nod, seemingly to herself, the woman stated, “I just may take you up on that. Would it be too much to ask to keep this between us?”

“It would,” I replied, formally, but without rancor. “**I am loyal to the Kirammans**, and while there is no need to seek out the Councilor as *soon* as we are done here, she will be informed of this… *incident*, as well as your continued reassurance that you will handle it in-house, along with **my belief that you will do just that.**”

“Then I must thank you for your honesty,” the diplomat mused. “It is… refreshing, and in short supply. I also… must apologize for Nozoral’s statements. Know that he does *not* speak for House Medarda. *I do.*”

“In which case, I wish you the best of luck convincing *him* of that,” I replied. “I doubt it will be a task easily accomplished.”

My statement caused her to smirk, a glimmer in her eye as she pronounced, “The best things never are. *Good day*, Mr. Talis.”

I nodded in reply, letting her have the last word, as she left, and I hoped that, this time, Mel Medarda would be able to do what she promised to.