

## 126 – The Incarnate’s Other Half

Emily’s wind was unseen around the battlefield at the foot of Fortress Major, but it was not unheard, as her magic caused a whooshing tunnel to form and echoed all sounds weirdly as they were bounced back.

“Good job,” I told her, having already witnessed two people get knocked back by her spell as they tried to sneak away.

Armen continued tending to the wounded, but he had saved all those with serious injuries that he could and was now treating minor cuts, broken bones, and such. Saoirse had disappeared, but my guess was that she was going to the marketplace at the top of the mountain.

I sat down on the hard ground which had only a sparse carpet of grass covering it, as well as some small saplings and bushes. Plenty of the civilians were coming down from the intense adrenaline high caused by the sudden ambush and many were clearly undergoing panic attacks as a result. It was a type of malady that Armen’s healing powers could do nothing to solve.

Though saying that, two of the Altar Expedition, a Brawler and a Crusader, were going around handing out bits of food and water to people, while exchanging some words of wisdom that seemed to soothe many of them, at least outwardly.

Merlisse wandered over without her team and sat down in front of me.

“Good work, Exorcist.”

“And you as well,” I said, though I had no idea how she’d fared as I’d been too busy thinking about Emily and myself.

“I have a question of some importance,” she started and I could guess what she wanted to ask about from the movements of her aura.

“It’s about my ‘Drain Spirit’, isn’t it?”

“That’s right. I would like to know if you are planning on seeking a specialisation as a Necromancer, as this would require my Order to monitor you closely.”

The memory of Kumi’s past shot to the forefront of my mind and I couldn’t help but feel a bit of heat flush my face, as anger at how she’d been treated filled my body. I took a deep breath to calm myself, but couldn’t completely wipe the frown off my face.

“I have no such plans.”

“But you are aware of Drain Spirit being an often-used tool of Necromancers, aren’t you?”

I had no idea, but I could guess that having a Singing Branch or some similar tool would probably allow me to somehow utilise and warp the souls I drained to turn people into my undead slaves.

“What does it matter? I do not plan to use it for nefarious means. Surely my actions display that commitment!”

She nodded. “I just wanted to be certain. At first when we met, I was taken aback by your capabilities, such as your ability to wield the flames of an elemental, but your actions paint you in a positive light. I will attempt to share my optimistic perspective on you with my Order, before word of your particular skill set causes an issue.”

My frown evaporated. “Really? You’d do that?”

“It is a waste of resources to hunt down those who are innocent,” she said. It was a naïve statement, but I could tell she believed it. If history and rumour were to be believed however, the Witch Hunters made quite a sport out of hunting the innocent.

*I wonder what Seramosa would’ve said if she was here...*

“Why is your Order so concerned with Necromancers?”

“Part of our Guild Charter is that we are beholden to the laws of the Crown. Included in these laws is the proper care and treatment of the deceased, though this is the domain of the Church. We however are called upon to deal with those Otherworlders that defy this law. Of course, there are many other things that might make us hunt someone as a Heretic, but this is the main cause. Necromancers are, by their very nature, ones who defile the dead, and thus they easily run afoul of this law. It is why they are hated.”

“Wouldn’t that mean Summoners and Exorcists are violating the same rule?”

“It depends on how it is interpreted. Not everyone believes that the spirits of those who are unable to pass to the Afterlife are considered protected, and thus utilising them in the effort of Exorcising harmful entities is considered a necessary evil.”

I wondered how Mortl was able to have her army of undead, but somehow I was sure that it was thanks to the Crown and some agreement they’d made.

“I see.”

Merlisse got up. “We will begin sending people into the halls of the mountain to drive out any that might still be hiding within. We’d like your aid for this.”

I nodded. All those who’d been working on behalf of Carmine Anabelle out here were either dead or apprehended, and Emily was looking much better than earlier. “We’ll lend our aid.”

After about two hours of searching the halls, we had not found a single straggler of the Assassins’ Guild or Demonologist’s group, and by now night had fully set. A makeshift area for the many people affected and displaced by the attack was established in the bottommost halls of the mountain, while guards and Expedition members were moving to the marketplace above, after a runner had spread the news that the fighting had subsided.

Armen, Emily, and I were part of the group heading to the market. I’d been keeping tabs on my friends with Karasumany from the sky and saw that they were mostly unscathed, though Ludwig had broken his right arm, while Elye and Renji were covered in cuts and bruises from the familiars they’d battled, alongside the leaders of the Demonologist’s cronies.

What confused me the most was the mist of pink smoke that covered the ground everywhere, and it wasn’t difficult to spot the fact that it was coming from Ludwig and his peculiar wand. Although, as I saw him through Karasumany’s eyes, I could tell that the true source was a familiar who was leaning against him while smoking some kind of golden pipe.

From the horns and purple-reddish skin, as well as the tail swishing through the air, there was no mistaking the familiar for a Demon, though I couldn’t tell what sort she was. Interestingly, her strange smoke seemed to have spellbound one of the Demonologist’s men.

While I was trying to ascertain her nature more closely, she turned around and spotted my crow, then blew a kiss at it, before my connection faltered.

*What the hell was that...*

The tunnels of Fortress Major’s mountain were carved smooth and the floor was slippery along the main thoroughfare, from decades of foot-traffic. Fortunately, they were wide enough that three people could walk abreast, which made sense, given that goods were routinely carted back and forth, though it was still not wide enough for beasts of burden to do the carting.

We eventually came to a great set of stairs, next to which was a somewhat-steep ramp. Following the stairs to the top, our group came out into the night air, our torches and the strange pink mist the only things really dispelling the darkness. Above, the moon was staring down at us and as its light touched Meigetsu, it turned visible to the people around us, though many seemed not to notice, as the mist held their attention.

*Move on a wider orbit so people don’t spot you easily,* I told the Lifeward and it obeyed immediately, zipping away and out of sight.

Our group, which contained guards, Adventurers and Witch Hunters, as well as merchants and civilians, split up to go in different directions. The guards seemed preoccupied with shoring up all

other potential exits, while the civilians were busy trying to figure out if their homes and goods were decimated or not. The rest of us moved towards the source of the pink mist.

“Armen, go heal my friends and the rest of the survivors.”

“**Understood**,” he said and moved ahead of us with long strides, starting with treating Ludwig’s broken arm.

“Hey Ryūta,” Renji said with a wave.

“*Yuuta!*” Elye exclaimed happily, then moved past me to embrace Emily in a hug.

“You look happy,” I told him.

He cast me a wide grin. “I just finished ranking up my last ability I needed.”

My eyes widened in surprise. “Does that mean?”

“That’s right, I can get an Advanced Role!”

“Congratulations,” I told him and meant it. I knew he must’ve worked hard for it.

“Renji did well for himself,” Ludwig commented, while Armen’s golden magic was healing his arm.

Out of the corner of my eye I spotted Merlisse heading off to see to some of her fellow Witch Hunters. Many of the other Expedition members just kind of stood around and looked at the destruction that’d been wrought.

“Who’s that guy?” I asked, indicating the spellbound man knelt before where Ludwig was sitting on a crate.

“One of the two leaders of Anabello’s little gang of troublemakers.”

*Troublemakers... that’s an understatement if I’ve ever heard one.*

“Have you seen Saoirse?” I asked him.

“Think she said she’d hunt down one of the people that ran away.”

I sighed. She was surprisingly eager to kill off the Demonologist’s men, despite stating that she’d just watch. But I suppose that she still felt slighted from having her head stolen.

“Who’s the woman behind you?” Emily asked.

I looked at Ludwig and didn’t see the horned lady, but, of course, Emily could see these things.

The Incarnate waved his metal wand and suddenly the mist condensed and took on a humanoid shape. Many of the nearby people gasped in surprise at seeing a Demon this close, but the Savant seemed unfazed by it.

“What’s the matter with y’all. You’ve never seen a Succubus before?”