

She remembered her first dance. Her crimson dress baring her shoulders as she stared helplessly into the dancing crowd. She had never danced before, let alone at one of these prestigious Noxian balls filled with judgmental royalty. All she could do was sip idly at her drink, until her father walked toward her with a boy behind him.

“Katarina, this is Talon. I’ve taken him under our wing, and I’d like for the two of you to dance together,” General Du Couteau announced. Talon – what a curious name – looked away, just as nervous as she was. His jacket was about a size too big – her father’s jacket, loaned in a hurry. Before Katarina could protest, the general left to discuss a matter with another officer, leaving the two alone. Talon looked back at Katarina, eyes full of worry.

“I don’t know how to dance,” he said, fearful of compromising his new position. She smiled.

“Neither do I.”

It was clumsy and painful at first. Many stepped toes, forced movements, and awkward glances to make sure nobody saw that. But as the night went on, she gazed into his eyes and saw within a kindred spirit. They relaxed, and let their worries fade away.

Those worries came surging back, ten years later, as Talon vaulted into the open window, bleeding from a head wound.

“He knew we’d make a move,” he announced, handing a scroll to Katarina and ignoring the worry on her face. “Three minutes before they catch up.”

The second story of an abandoned building in Noxus was not a place to have a fight. Putting aside her fears, Katarina unrolled the scroll and took a thorough read in the dim torchlight.

“Two minutes.”

“It’s orders for my father,” Katarina half-gasped. “Sent to Shurima to find an artifact. Top-secret mission, matter of national security.”

“A pretense to remove him,” Talon asserted. “Nothing’s there.”

Despite Talon’s harsh claim, hope struck Katarina like a dagger. She always knew her father had to be alive, but for the first time in seven years, she finally had a lead on his whereabouts. She could go out and find him at long last. It took all her willpower not to break out in joyous laughter. Talon flashed a smile at reading her new expression.

“One minute. We need to move.”

She rolled up the scroll again, but paused and stopped to examine Talon’s wound. He brushed off her hand. “Just a scratch,” he said. “His pets.” That was all she needed to confirm he would be fine, and Noxus’s two greatest assassins leaped from the window and onto the streets of Noxus. All they had to do was get out of the city and they would be fine. The civilians made it easy for them, panicking and quickly hiding in their houses. It was a simple plan. She liked simple plans. She got her scar because she botched a simple plan. Simple was good. It was foolproof.

Best of all, when she heard the great alarm horns of Noxus signaling the guard to stop the criminals, she could adapt, because a simple plan only had one element in it. So long as she and Talon escaped, it would be a success. Even if Katarina and Talon had to fight their way through half of Noxus, her father was the leader and swordsman Noxus desperately needed.

To anyone else, Noxus's finest would be a significant impediment. She remembered their handiwork, catching and summarily executing the most notorious of thieves while forcibly drafting the best of the first-time offenders. They were pragmatic and loyal and capable beyond doubt.

To Katarina and Talon, calling them an impediment would have been generous. There used to be a half-dozen Noxian guards standing their way. A half-second later, there were now a half-dozen standing corpses with daggers in their hearts, the duo not even stopping.

There were more, of course. But filled with purpose, Katarina and Talon made short work of them. A quartet of guards charged out from an alley, only for Talon to bury his blade in the leader as Katarina bounced a dagger off the other three's necks. A pair of archers attempted to stop them from higher ground, not expecting either of them to close the gap in an instant and cut open their throats. Faced with a dozen guards, Talon tossed Katarina into the air as she spun about, hurling daggers with pinpoint accuracy. Before she landed, all twelve guards had a dagger lodged in a vital point.

The gates were visibly in reach. Still open, too. Even with the ground shaking, Katarina could see their freedom right there, in the moonli-

Ground shaking?

"...XUUUUUUUS!"

"Oh no," Talon gasped. Katarina's face filled with dread. They were able to kill any mortal man effortlessly, but what do you do against an undead juggernaut?

With seconds left, Talon disappeared in a storm of steel as Katarina stared down the charging Sion, death in his eyes. In the back of her head, she knew she was right if Swain had dispatched his precious weapon just to stop them. It was not hard to evade Sion either – Katarina simply jumped to the right as he charged past-

That hulk stopped?!

She had a half-second of time to bring up her daggers in a defense as Sion swung his axe and threw her into a wall through the sheer force of impact. Pain coursed through everywhere as she struggled to get up, her daggers shattered.

That was when Talon emerged, plunging his blade and all of his knives into Sion's back. "Go! Now!" he shouted.

She flashed back to the boy she shared a first dance with, and was paralyzed at the thought of leaving him. She never considered having to leave Talon to succeed.

But Talon simply nodded. Sion flailed around, nearly shaking off Talon. Reluctantly, Katarina leaped outside of the city gates. Talon flung a dagger, cutting a rope and closing the gates to everything Katarina held dear.