

A Type of Liberation

“It was quite... political.”

When Swain’s raven visited, Vladimir had spent the afternoon studying a tome he himself had authored over a century ago. His lifespan was potentially infinite, but his memory wasn’t. To advance the craft, he had to perpetually revise it. He wrote, he experimented, and he taught. Magelings would compete to hear the secrets of life explained in his voice, and when they needed guidance, he would seize their minds and show them how to think.

“I will compensate you if you did not find the case intriguing,” answered the creature in a familiar voice. “But judging by your mood, it is otherwise. What happened?”

What had happened involved a captured Demacian highborn. For commoners and nobles alike, the ultimatum was the same: “Serve Noxus or be destroyed.” The girl had refused to speak to anyone, let alone bow to the empire.

“They told me of you,” she said as soon as Vlad entered her prison.

She was younger than expected, too young to excite him, but perfect in every other way. Well bred, well fed and with many years left, years he could take and dedicate to the study of his craft. He decided to try to convince her, and carry out a quick, clean sacrifice if he failed. Mercy.

“I won’t be a servant, a hostage, or fuel for your foul sorceries.”

There was a weapon in her hand and she drove it hilt-deep below her navel in one rapid movement. Whimpering, whispering prayers to herself, she carved further down. Her self-destructive rage only faltered

when the pain overwhelmed her senses and she collapsed, leaving bloodied handprints on the windowsill.

Vlad rushed to her side. The weapon was a sharp wooden stake she'd pried off the furniture.

"Foolish child, do you desire death so much?"

"I'm no use to you now," she mustered the strength to reply.

The mage shook off the final traces of surprise.

"I will let you bleed out, if you so desire."

He sat on the stained windowsill, trying to recall the last time he spoke to a Demacian. Unlike Noxus, they were a nation of closed borders and stagnated morals. He inspected the girl's mutilated lower half, trying to gauge how long she had left.

"Your family will demand an answer. Is there anything they should know?"

She turned her head to the side, the inner struggle evident.

"Decide quickly. You don't have long left. You'll know it's less than a minute when the pain starts to fade."

"Tell father I regret I only ever angered him. Tell them all I'm sorry."

"I don't mean to pry," Vlad began. "But why are you sorry?"

"I ran away."

"How did they capture you?"

"I sailed to Piltover."

Zaun would not have been kind to her, and yet she'd chosen it over her homeland.

“May I ask why you ran away?”

“Stupidity.”

“Could you not live the life you wanted in Demacia? Were you looking for adventure?”

Her head tilted upwards, eyes meeting his. She saw with the clarity of death that this would be her last confession.

“I wanted adventure.”

But there was more.

“Maybe I could live the life I wanted if I was normal.”

“Tell me about that life,” he said in a velvety voice.

“I... don't know. If I was someone else...”

She saw that life too well with her fading vision, and knew it was impossible for her. She averted her gaze again, and the mage watched her sob quietly, expiring, fading away more with every second.

“Did your father know you had a gift for magic?”

She shook her head.

Vlad jolted to his feet. Swain had played him again. Every time the Grand General asked a small favour of him it turned out to be a puzzle, a test of his loyalties. Attempt to serve Noxus or watch, not intervening, as the girl's talents were wasted?

He could only do the former.

“Do you want to die?”

“I want to live. But I can't, not the way I am.”

She paused.

“And it’s too late for me, isn’t it?”

The glimmer of hope was everything Vlad needed.

“What do they call you?”

“Lucille... Lucy.”

“Lucy, whether you live or die today depends on you.”

He kneeled beside her, their eyes on the same level.

“Take my hand and follow. Find the will to survive and focus your mind. This is your only chance.”

Lucy saw nothing but death as her past flashed before her eyes. She eyed his outstretched hand, the refined hand of a scholar, and chose to grasp the lifeline. He’d taught this before to more advanced students, with less urgency. One in a hundred aspirants would succeed. Finally, a challenge Lucy welcomed.

When it was over his fingers were a bit bonier, his skin had lost its radiance and his face showed the first signs of age. But Lucy’s wound was gone.

“What did you do?”

“Nothing. It was all you.”

She inspected herself in disbelief. There was fear, and wonder, and the exaltation of having defeated death. And something more.

“I will let you rest now,” the mage said. “But what you accomplished today was the easy part. That old, festering wound inside you – closing that will take more than a basic lesson in blood magic.”

With these words he left.

“What a shame she had to travel to death’s door to shake off her chains. But catharsis is never gentle. It is strange that the murderer gave life, that the subjugator gave her freedom.”

“Is it?”

Swain’s raven tilted its head in contemplation.

“She is a prodigy of the arcane arts,” it said.

“Did she accept, then?”

“Her talents will serve Noxus well. Her success will be a testament to our ways. One day she will teach Demacia what you taught her. Now, lest I forget – your reward.”

A piece of papyrus. A name, a place and a date. One more step towards eternity.