

Talon's thoughts drifted with quiet bitterness as he crossed the central market. Even as dusk fell, the row sizzled with life and loud voices, idle banter as irritating as the oily stench of fried bolbo pouring from a nearby stand.

A darker cloak covered the cape of blades woven into midnight blue leather, hiding it, disguising him as a lost, wandering shadow. Discretion was necessary each time he decided to avoid the reeking network of the underbelly. Talon had purposely chosen that path across the market, at times he needed to remember the life without a purpose in the unforgiving streets of Noxus.

Even after years, his fingers still itched as he passed by a heap of naaps and Kumungu berries offered on a stand. Despite his discipline, he could barely resist easy food; hunger was forever engraved in his bones.

His honed senses perceived steps approaching, hasty, energetic, clumsy like a pup. Talon knew they belonged to a child, a rascal of the slums. His lips curved into a mirthless smile: he had been targeted.

The Blade's Shadow glanced over his shoulder. The mere glint across those golden eyes in the darkness of the hood was enough to paralyze the guttersnipe. They felt like a dagger against the boy's throat, a quiet threat forcing him to retreat into the alley, instantly forgetting his pickpocketing intentions. Talon followed him, slow and patient, until the dark cloth concealing his cloak fell from his shoulders, revealing him as one of Noxus' most feared.

"At least you are not a complete beginner", the assassin remarked dully and uninterested as he passed by the boy's side. "You knew the guards no longer patrol this area after the sun disappears behind the southern noxtoraa".

Despite his threatening presence, Talon continued his way to the dead end. “Never choose a faceless target. Next time might be your last.” Without another word, he vanished into the shadows of the alley. He had been that child years ago, meager, hungry, dirty.

The city walls and ledges were a labyrinth and Talon had memorized every possible way. He crossed the rooftops like a dark blur, vaulting and redirecting the momentum into another acrobatic jump to land, crouching and soundless on a balcony.

The mansion ahead glowed dimly in the Noxian night like a jewel in the darkness. It was the residence of a powerful noble, one of the few who still dared to not fully support Jericho Swain. And in the past weeks, he had managed to lose everything that still made him useful. The High Command had ordered to silence him, no discordant voices would be allowed in the Empire.

Talon had studied the estate several nights before; he knew the path the guards patrolled, observed their schedules, calculated their pace.

There was only a flash of steel before the damp crunch similar to a broken eggshell alerted the second sentinel. His companion was now pinned to the ivy-covered wall behind him. Still standing, still on duty, visibly dead.

The guard panicked and instinctively rose his gaze, only to see hawk-like wings outlined by the moonlight reverberating on the sharp edges of a bladed cloak. As Talon landed, so did the corpse.

The razor had easily pierced through flesh and bone alike. The guard could not even scream or alert the others, such was the silence of an instant death, the surgical precision was a mere testament to Du Couteau’s teachings. With a flick of his arm, the assassin removed the blade and cleaned off the blood on the dead man’s tabard as if the stained steel irritated him.

Above, the second floor was still illuminated by the gentle glow of candles, marking his objective. The manor's wall traced a clear path, the cracks between the ornaments and the vines, all formed a natural stair in his eyes, firm and comfortable, unlike the shabby rooftops of the slums.

The window opened easily and Talon slithered in, silent, imperceptible. His shadow stretched forward, covering the target's desk. By the time the old man saw it, the icy edge was pressed against his neck forcing him to look up, into the shadowed gold of the assassin's eyes.

But it was Talon's blood the one which froze as he met the dark green staring at him fearlessly even before death. He had seen it before, that unbreakable will, that Noxian pride, the same values General Du Couteau had embodied.

"He is not a visionary, he is a demon," the man hissed through gritted teeth, defiant like a wounded, graying lion.

The assassin's eyes narrowed, as the only flicker of emotion stirred the frozen essence within. Perhaps there was more lurking beneath the bleak, merciless face of the executioner. The memory of his mentor, his relationship with the High Command, his death.

"He is the lies Noxus wants to hear". Talon retorted without passion.

"Noxus can rise without his darkness. Noxus..." A man like him could only die with the Empire's name on his lips, the undeniable dignity of a warrior.

"Perhaps." The light across the noble's gaze disappeared as Talon's blade was progressively coated in blood. He never allowed his targets to speak. He felt strange.

He had sworn he would kneel to no one but Du Couteau, yet there he was, once more, serving the Empire just like Katarina's father had. Obedience would be rewarded. But, was that enough for him to kill, live and die for a Noxus that had tried to claim his life as many times as he had dropped bodies in the gutter? Through his blades he had risen from the slums, the soulless steel had become everything he was, his victories, his failures, his memories.

Talon turned back. The corpse was left slumped on the desk between the undelivered letters.

"Noxus is the board where shadows play. You chose the losing side."

He had assassinated another noble, a good man who incarnated the lost virtues of the Empire.