

171 – The End of His Reign

Ludwig was out in the lobby with his Succubus, working some kind of magic to sway the minds of the Healers. The Red Haze was steadily expanding into the room we were in, and I could hear them bickering to each other like an old married couple.

“Let me at least have one of them.”

“No.”

“But I’m hungry! And their pain is delectable. They are so stoic and fun to break.”

“Just do your job.”

“Ludwig baby, don’t be that way.”

“I’ve told you no. Shut it before I make you.”

“Make me.”

Something like a loud *zap* sounded from the lobby.

“Ouch! Do it again.”

A loud sigh followed. “Can you please just do what I asked you?”

“Fine.”

Mortl was using the floor to draw out a ritual circle within which lay the body of the Demonologist. It seemed like she was going to turn him into a puppet, which I guess was a fairly easy way to convince everyone that he was dead for good. But it was also just gruesome.

On the bed, Armen had laid Elye flat on her back after extracting the knife and closing the wound. He was knelt in front of her like in prayer, his hands glowing as they worked to heal her body.

I hadn’t seen what timer was listed on her promised death, so I had no idea if she was meant to die today or not.

“She will live,” said Saoirse.

The Dullahan had returned to her human disguise and wore a black version of her summer’s dress, almost as if she was in mourning. Though perhaps the colour black was meant for celebration, since death was her trade. It was hard to know with her.

“I didn’t realise she was planning something so stupid,” I muttered, looking at the Elfin, whose eyes were closed in sleep. I couldn’t ever recall seeing her sleep, except for when the Illusionist had locked her and Lukas into a fake sleep with his magic back in Helmstatter.

“Skovslot Elfin mate for life,” Mortl said. She seemed knowledgeable about them, since she had in the past helped their Enclave.

“Do they go into death together?”

“They do, though I suppose that she wanted her revenge first.”

Mortl had been there when Elye killed Lukas before the Flayed Lady’s curse could get to him and turn him into a monster. She hadn’t ever talked to me about it, but I could tell that she respected Lukas for wanting to retain his humanity and Elye for having the power to fulfil his request.

I let out a deep breath. “I can’t lose her like this. I’m so fucking mad that she would do *that!*”

“She will live,” Saoirse said again. “Her promised death is yet to come.”

“**Have faith in my healing magic,**” Armen added. “**I have cured you of much worse, this much is nothing.**”

Mortl got up from the floor. “Step back,” she told Saoirse and I.

“When you are done parading around the corpse, make sure to burn it to ash,” the Dullahan said. “Leave nothing to be resurrected.”

“Fret not, Reaper. I am not making more of my kind, least of all with this bastard.”

“Do you think Carmine’s ritual worked?” I asked.

“No clue.”

“It worked,” Saoirse answered.

“Can you tell where the Realm Gate will move to?” Mortl asked her.

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“Tell me how to find your true body and I will reveal its new location.”

Would you tell me where?

Perhaps.

Before Mortl could perform her ritual to reanimate the Demonologist’s corpse, Elye gasped awake.

“*Yuuta! Where am I?*”

I went over to her side immediately.

“What were you thinking!?” I scolded her, then hugged her tightly. “You idiot.”

Leaving Redmoss Enclave was strange. By the time Elye was capable of walking with Armen and me supporting her, Ludwig’s Succubus had spread its phantasm across the entire Enclave and all the Elfin were in a daze.

The Succubus was skipping along besides Armen, while the Incarnate looked worn-out.

“That’s the second time I’ve had to perform that trick here,” he told me.

“*Last time was more fun,*” said the Succubus.

He rubbed the skin next to his metallic eye. “It sucked. But it’s a good thing these Elfin are so susceptible to Liw’s Power.”

“Because of their self-inflicted pain?” I asked him.

“Partly, but it’s actually more due to the fact that they use their pain as a way to communicate as a hivemind within their families. It’s pretty creepy.”

I suddenly realised why our Guide had been jamming its nails into his chest earlier. It was like some occult walkie-talkie.

“And that makes them easy to sway?”

“Yep.”

The Gatekeeper opened the way out of the bramble wall for us as we came near and I wondered if it too was under his power. Such a thing was hard to imagine, though perhaps not impossible for a Demon to achieve.

When we exited Redmoss Enclave, the Guardian closed the way behind us and crawled away along the wall to continue its patrol. Within minutes, we were swarmed by King’s men and Witch Hunters. Oliver wasn’t amongst them. Clearly Emily’s words had gotten through to him, although Redmoss was also several days of hard riding from the city.

All told, there were sixty of them and every last one of them were Otherworlders, and as they saw the reanimated puppet that ambled in front of Mortl with unnatural movements and a green glint to its eyes, a cheer of victory resounded across their ranks.

The female leader of the Witch Hunters stationed here ran up to us and asked, “How did he die!?”

“Oliver’s poisonous sword killed him,” Mortl said.

The stab wound from Elye’s knife had been covered up, such that it was impossible to see.

“Was he dead when you got there? Did he have other schemes prepared!?”

“All his schemes were foiled,” I answered, while avoiding the first, as Saoirse summoned the black carriage from further into the forest.

The carriage sped through the trees and skidded to a halt in front of us, the hooves of the black horses tearing grooves in the moss-covered earth, it felt like it was a limousine taking us away from a crowd of paparazzi.

“Are you taking his corpse back to the King?” the woman asked.

“Of course,” Mortl answered. “And worry not, I shall make mention of your Order and its impressive work in halting the mastermind’s plans.”

The woman looked pleased with herself, as we all filed into the carriage one-by-one.

By the time the door closed, she was already issuing orders to the others and they quickly began packing down their tents to return back to Evergreen. they wouldn’t arrive until several days after us though.

I sat down by one of the tables within the vast space of Saoirse’s carriage and Elye settled herself down next to me, along with Armen.

“Yuuta, I will visit Lukas’ grave and tell him that he does not have to wait for me anymore. He can go to the Mother Tree and be reborn. I will find him again in the future.”

“If rebirth is possible, do you think my wife and children are out there waiting for me?”
Armen wondered philosophically.

Elye clapped him on the back. *“We will find them together!”*

I glanced over to Mortl. She was leading the puppet of our hated foe down into the basement of the place, such that we didn’t have to look at him.

Unlike the Capgras Demon, the Flayed Noble, or Leopold and Nirvah, Carmine Anabello hadn’t been someone terrifying in the end. Perhaps that was the thing that unsettled me the most. He was just a delusional person, driven to the edge by his bad experiences and hatred of the Royal Family.

Owl hadn’t been much different. Common amongst them was the warped belief that the end goal was all that mattered, although Owl had cared about saving as many as possible, while Carmine had sought to safeguard the future of Otherworlders. I thought both were very misguided and broken men, but perhaps there was no way to enact a change without taking drastic measures.

Part of me thought that, if I could go to where all those hopeless new Otherworlders arrived, then I could help them get established in the world without the need for dangerous Quests that would kill half of them within their first year. At the very least, I wanted to help all those hopelessly-lost Exorcists that’d wind up in Mondus and be outcast because of their inherent misfortunes.

I will give you the new location of the Realm Gate, if you truly wish to follow this path, Saoirse said in my thoughts. I wondered why she was suddenly interested in helping Otherworlders.

First I will save Kumi.

You are going through with that after all?

I have to. I loved her once after all, and I think, with my new power, I can make her human again.

Shall I aim our carriage in her direction?

Not yet. Let’s return to Evergreen first. I need my full Party if I’m going to take her on.