Unto Darkness, Starlight

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Summary

If anyone had told Shikako a few years ago that she would be reborn after dying at an old age, she would have probably started laughing. She's not laughing now.

Escaping their mother, Shikako and her new twin sister have set out to find safety, and, if they're lucky, a real family.

Notes

You should be able to follow this without much help, but in case you haven't read one or the other of these niche fandoms:

Summary of Dreaming of Sunshine: The main character, Shikako, is reborn from our world into the world of Naruto. She is Shikamaru's twin sister, of the Nara clan, so she can manipulate shadows. She also has a connection to the god-entity Gelel, which she communes with from a stone she wears as a necklace, and whom she can find by following music she can hear.

Summary of I am a Child of this House: Estelle is a reborn woman from Korea who was horribly confined and abused by her mother. When her father— the terrifying Duke Castielo—learns of her existence, she is quickly brought into his household, and educated as a Lady, while also slowly unravelling the secrets of her Family's line, of magic, and of the country
itself.
Chapter 1

For there is no friend like a sister in calm or stormy weather; to cheer one on the tedious way, to fetch one if one goes astray, to lift one if one totters down, to strengthen whilst one stands. - Christina Rossetti

If anyone had told Shikako a few years ago that she would be reborn after dying at an old age, she would have probably started laughing. She was so ready to finally rest. But here she was again, in a new body. At least this world wasn't the life-and-death struggle of her previous life. Well, she didn't think it was. Anyways, it was hard to get a sense of this world, when she spent most of her time as a toddler locked in a chest in her own mother's room.

Well, at least she still had a twin. Blonde-haired and pink-eyed, her twin was a sweet girl who seemed just as aware of the world as Shikako. Imagine her surprise when she realized that her sister was just like how she used to be in her past life; a modern-day woman reincarnated into another world.

Luckily, since this was not Shikako's first time falling into a fantasy world, she wasn't surprised by this sort of thing and adapted quickly. Compared to her last life, in the world of Naruto, this world so far had been much less deadly. In the world of Naruto, she nearly died as an infant during the Kyuubi attack, the first of many near-deaths she would experience. After years of stressing over the end of the world and dying by a crazed near immortal Uchiha, Shikako felt almost peaceful in this new world.

'Yes, being locked up in this box sucks but at least I have my sister with me.' Snuggling closer to the sleeping toddler, Shikako smiled as her sister held her hand tighter in her sleep.

"Sister, I'm hungry." Rubbing her sister's back, Shikako cursed their so-called mother for the third time that day. That wretched woman had been locking them up longer and longer, constantly forgetting to bring them food or let them out to go to the bathroom.

"I'm sorry, Sis," Shikako replied, petting her soft hair. It was so soft and silky, despite the fact that they hadn't washed in a couple of days. Even in this cramped box, her hair seemed to shine in the faint light seeping through the cracks in the lid. It wouldn't surprise Shikako one wit if her sister had a kekkei genkai for perfect hair.

Soft hands reached out and clasped Shikako's face, pulling her into snuggle as her sister began to softly cry.

"My stomach hurts," she whispered, muffling her sobs in Shikako's neck, "I want out."

Clutching her sister back, Shikako felt her heartbreak at the sound. The sound of a door slamming open, and a screeching voice swearing up a storm made them freeze in shock.

The latch of the box was fiddled with before the lid was ripped open and an angry woman with beautiful golden hair sneered down at them.

"Ugh, you two reek. Get out and clean yourselves up, I will not have you wretched brats tainting my clothes with your stench."
Red nails clawed at their bodies, as she threw them out of the box and onto the floor. Her heels clacking, as she walked towards her closet and began tearing some beautiful dresses into shreds.

"Ugh, these are worthless. What was he thinking?! As if these cheap things could pacify me?!

Crawling onto their knees, Shikako and her sister slowly toddled their way towards the bucket of cold water by the corner. Pulling their clothes off, Shikako glared as she realized her sister had some faint marks from their 'mother's' nails.

"Why aren't you two done cleaning yourselves yet?! Hurry up!" Pulling her sister into an embrace, Shikako barely managed to save her from being hit from a flung heel.

Using a questionable looking rag, they quickly washed and redressed. Once their mother had inspected them, she threw some pieces of bread and cheese at the ground before them before flaunting out the room.

"Think it's safe to eat?" Her sister asked, carefully reaching down to grab the cheese and bread.

"It looks a little stale," Shikako remarked, carefully pulling a piece off. They only had a few minutes to eat before their mother would return to lock them up again for the rest of the afternoon.

Finishing their meagre meal, Shikako stood in front of her sister and began to sing as they stretched.

"I woke up in the morning and saw the mountain there, it was a common sight that drove me to despair."

Her sister, now familiar with this song, began to sing the second line, " If I tip my head right back, and say my prayers to the sky, If I reach into the blueness, will I soon learn to fly?"

Shikako's mother from her last life, her real mother, Yoshino Nara, had taught it to her to help her remember her daily stretches. Now, Shikako had taught it to her sister. It's one of their little secrets, something they need that their new 'mother' can't take away. Even so, they continue through the song quickly and quietly, so they won't be discovered.

Not even a minute after they had finished the song, did they hear the sound of heels getting louder. The woman burst into the room, still sneering at the twins, before digging her claws into their arms and locking them away again. They could feel her moving the box out onto the balcony, the wind seeping through the cracks and making goosebumps appear on their skin.

Wincing at the nail marks on her arms, Shikako reached out into the darkness for her sister's hands.

"Sis? Let's practice a bit more, 'kay?"

Shikako could sense her sister's smile as her golden hair moved in a nod.

"Okay, first is Tori. Remember you have to cross your fingers like so and…"

They practiced all twelve hand signs for the rest of the afternoon, doing them over and over till their fingers cramped and their hands felt a little raw.

"Hey, Sis". Shikako's sister whispered in her ear, as she tried to find a comfortable position to sleep in.

"Yeah?" She whispered back, feeling the slight hesitance in her sister's voice.

"Do you think our daddy knows about us?" Her sister's pink eyes almost glowed with hope, as a
stray sunbeam peeked into the box.

"...I doubt it." Shikako muttered, looking away with a sigh, "That woman has been hiding us for years, I don't think he would know unless she can make some money out of it." Having children isn't good for her business, after all.

Turning towards her sister, Shikako gently brushed the too long strands away from her gaunt looking face.

"...Do you think he would want us then? If he knew about us?"

Shikako held back a sigh, her sister's fondest wish was having a family again. She had spent days talking about how great her past life's parents were and how happy she was to have Shikako as a sister in this one. Yet, a small part of her couldn't help yearn for a parent to love and support them here.

Not willing to crush her innocent dreams, Shikako gave her a small kiss on the forehead.

"...Yeah. I think he would."

The days had been steadily growing colder, and the woman had gotten into the habit of leaving them longer and longer outside on the balcony. Some days, Shikako worried they would freeze to death, huddling into her sister's warmth as the air stabbed their skin like knives.

Today had been particularly bad. The winds were especially harsh and the sky had been rumbling with thunder for about an hour. The storm would bear down on them soon, and they would be helpless before the elements. If the temperature didn't drop enough that the cold took them, the water that would seep into that cracked lid of their chest might drown them. Shikako didn't know how, but she knew one way or another, they had to get out of this chest.

'It's going to rain, we have to get inside.' Shikako thought, trying to make the cracks in the lid bigger with her hands, and encouraging her sister to do the same.

Rain began to fall and quickly dripped into their chest and onto them. The bottom of the box was sturdy and had recently been fixed by that thrice-damned woman's current lover. The wind howled as lightning crackled and streaked across the sky, allowing for Shikako to see the wide, terrified eyes of her sister stare back at her from her corner of the box.

"Sis, I'm scared."

"Don't give up, keep trying to get those cracks bigger," Shikako ordered, hiding her growing fear with fierce determination. The minutes seemed to crawl as the water slowly started to pool at their feet, steadily rising as the storm grew louder and wilder.

"The water is rising! Sister!"

Taking a deep breath, Shikako reached out and grabbed her sister's hand.

"We're going to be okay. Keep trying!"

Letting go, Shikako began wildly attacking the walls, trying to tip it or do some kind of damage. Her weak, three-year-old body was too malnourished to put any force into it and her nails were bleeding from trying to pry the wood open. The pain didn't even register. Shikako felt more than heard her sister panicking behind her, time was running out.
Sounds started to fade away as Shikako began to hear her own heartbeat grow louder in her ears. The water was now reaching their waist, and her sister's screams felt muffled by the roar of the storm.

'When had that much water gotten in?' she thought, vaguely noticing it start to turn pink due to her bleeding hands. Her sister sobbed and choked in fear behind her, crying out for that woman to let them out and that they didn't want to die.

Feeling her body turn numb, Shikako slowly looked behind her at the sound of a splash. Her sister had tripped and briefly went under water before popping back up again.

"Sister! HELP!" she sobbed, reaching out towards Shikako with red looking hands. She looked so small like that, hair drenched and plastered against her head, her wide, terrified eyes taking up most of her face, unable to keep from letting loose heartbreaking sobs

'No...this can't be happening.' Shikako thought, allowing herself to be pulled into a hug as her sister cried into her shoulder. 'I was one of the generals of the fourth great shinobi war, I was feared among the other ninja villages for my seals. I should be able to get us out of here.' Her sister's body was so weak in her arms, as she trembled with fear.

'Why...? After living through all that, why can't I save her? Why aren't I strong enough to save my little sister?!' Shikako mentally screamed, clutching her back as tightly as possible.

The water was reaching their necks now, forcing them both to get onto their tippy toes and push their faces as close to the lid as possible.

Fear drenched them more than the rain as the box shook with the force of the wind and the wood groaned at the pressure of the rising water. Yet still, the blasted thing refused to break open.

'No, this can't be the end!' Panicking completely now, Shikako slammed her fists against the lid, distantly noticing her sister start to do the same, 'No! We won't die here! We WON'T!'

A strange yet familiar feeling bloomed at the centre of her body, responding to heed her will. The feeling slowly made its way up her arms and into her fists as she pounded against the lid. Darkness spread from her hands, startling her sister into silence and creeping into the cracks of the lid. With great effort, Shikako willed the darkness — the shadows — to pry at the cracks, physically feeling the strain of the effort.

Slowly, the darkness squeezed the wood, making it groan ominously as the whole thing shook. Shikako felt her sister grab her head and push them both underwater as the lid broke into small dangerous pieces.

Tipping the box over, the twins fell harshly onto the cement floor of the balcony as they choked and sobbed in each other's arms. They clung to each other for several minutes, the storm fading away, just relieved that they were alive. Shikako's muscled screamed to her in agony as she gently unlocked her arms from her sister's embrace. Her body felt heavy and drained of energy, yet the next crack of thunder reminded her of their continued danger.

They weren't going to drown anymore, but they weren't safe yet either. They never would be, if they stayed with this woman. They needed to get out of this storm, and away from this house.

"We have to leave, we can't stay here anymore," Shikako muttered, leaning heavily against her sister's warm body.

"W-where would we go?" she trembled, clutching Shikako in a side hug, as they hobbled towards
the door. Going onto her tippy toes Shikako reached out a weak hand towards the door handle.

"Anywhere...it doesn't matter." Anywhere would be better than staying with that vile woman, even if it meant they were on their own. She weakly strained and stretched but no matter how hard she tried she couldn't reach that door handle.

Her vision flickered for a moment, as exhaustion began to set in her body. They were running out of time, soon Shikako would be too weak to move and they'd be trapped in this hell for who knows how much longer. Centring her mind, Shikako reached inside of herself to that spot where that power had flowed from. Already she could tell this energy was very low, but for the sake of her sister, Shikako would push herself to use it one more time.

"-ister? Sister, can you hear me?!"

"...Don't worry, we're going to get out. I promise," Darkness flowed from her body once more and crawled up the wooden door. Her sister yelped in fright and her grip grew tighter. The shadows wavered for a moment, as Shikako's concentration flickered in pain before she recentered herself.

Slowly, it crawled and wrapped itself of the door handle, before turning it and opening the balcony door. Keeping herself focused, the shadow reached towards the other door across the room and managed to unlock it before fading away.

Feeling faint, Shikako nudged her shocked twin towards the exit, they were so close she could almost taste their freedom.

"Sister wha-" Reaching out with a trembling hand, Shikako gently placed a finger against her sister's lips.

"Shush, escape now, questions later."

The lightning illuminated them, as they wobbled out the room and into freedom.

End of Chapter 1
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

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Summary of I am a Child of this House: Estelle is a reborn woman from Korea who was horribly confined and abused by her mother. When her father-the terrifying Duke Castielo - learns of her existence, she is quickly brought into his household, and educated as a Lady, while also slowly unravelling the secrets of her Family's line, of magic, and of the country itself.

Something was wrong with her sister.

In that box, inches from death, her sister had done the impossible. She had twisted the suffocating darkness around them to her will, and used those black ribbons to free them. From the water, from the darkness, from the chest… from their mother. In those moments, her sister had been… overwhelming. Indescribable, almost.

Though she knew she couldn't hear anything over the storm, it was like a concert of sounds and voices all speaking and singing at once. If she listened closely, her sister's voice echoed through all of them.

Powerful. Confident. Unstoppable. For a few brief moments, the world belonged to her sister, and it was a place fear did not exist.

But then they had escaped. Her sister had released the shadows, unable to control them any longer by her own admission. And with every step they took away from their home, it got worse. Her older twin took the lead as always, but it seemed she was running on instinct. By the time they had gotten to a place her sister had dully deemed “safe,” it was hard to remember those moments of power at all. They had huddled together in this abandoned hut, and she felt, more than heard, the last of her sister's voices fade away.

Seeing her sister now, pink eyes vacant and blonde hair tangled around her ears, she looked like a broken doll, lifeless and limp against the brick wall of their shelter.

“Sister? Sister please, this isn't funny!” Her scraped palms ached as she shook her unresponsive sister gently, her voice cracking from the pain.

“Please, please don't leave me. Sister I love you!” Pushing her face into her sisters neck, she sobbed pitifully, ”Please don't leave me all alone…”
Warmth pooled by her knees, startling her into looking down at her sister's hands. Blood slowly oozed from her nails and palms, with wood chips sticking out of her palms.

“Blood…” she whispered, slowly reaching out to wipe her sister's hands. Just before touching them, she froze as a stray thought crossed her mind.

‘Wait. I remember something about this...in Korea my mom, she had placed me in that special course.... I learned something about unresponsive people’ Clutching her head in pain, she forced herself to try and remember those faded memories.

To be completely honest, she didn't like remembering anything besides her parents from her past life. Those memories had kept her sane while trapped inside that box, and had entertained her sister on really bad days. It was only for those reasons that she kept a strong grip on those memories... but everything else had her heart screaming in grief. Thoughts on who she was — Seo Young — her dreams and goals — she wanted to be an artist, but had little talent for it — they just reminded her too much of what she had lost -friends, lovers, careers, culture, languages, whywhywhy!?

Shaking her head like a dog, she tried again to force herself to remember. This wasn't about her, it was about her sister who needed her help. Her sister who was staring blankly, practically unconscious, at the wall. If only she could remember what she had been taught she might be able to help her!

Memories slipped through her mind like sand between her hands, as she strained to recall anything, so long as it was useful, to help her.

‘Her body is so cold...That’s it! Body Heat!’ Smiling wildly, she carefully pulled her sister into her arms and tried to cover her body as much as possible. Rubbing at her sister's arms and legs, she carefully avoided her bleeding hands and nuzzled into her neck.

‘...Mom used to sing a song to me when I was sick,’ she thought, cuddling her sister closer, ‘So maybe…’

Combing her fingers through her sister’s hair, she started to softly sing.

“Hey doggie, don’t bark! Our baby sleeps so well. Hey chickie, don’t bark! You’ll wake our child’s sweet sleep,” she crooned, ignoring the tears silently falling from her eyes. “Hush, hush, our baby, our baby sleeps so well.”

“A baby more beautiful than the moon. A baby more beautiful than the stars.” She couldn’t help but think about how mesmerizing her sister had appeared as she held her hand in that wretched box and told her everything would be ok. The lightning had flashed, and allowed her to see her sister’s eyes burn like rubies, her hair sparkled like spun gold with water droplets shining like diamonds weaved in. She looked like one of those angels in the museums back in Korea; those western angels with swords, who slayed demons and attacked the wicked. My angel sister.

“Hush hush our baby, our baby sleeps so well.”

She looked like an angel, even now. A fallen angel, or a beaten one, but an angel nonetheless. Blessed, and certain to recover. She must.

‘I truly am so lucky to have her as my sister in this life. Without her, I would have probably given up and just let myself fade away into nothing,’ she thought, eyes slowly closing as the exhaustion of the day drained her energy.

“A baby more beautiful than flowers. A baby more precious than gold.” That is what her sister
means to her, a ray of light in this dark and foreign world. More precious than any piece of jewelry that woman had flaunted and mooned over.

Her hand slipped from her sister’s hair, as she quietly mumbled the last line of the song before falling into a deep sleep.

“Hush hush our baby... our baby sleeps so ...well.”

Morning came far too soon. The storm had ended, and the sun was shining. She wasn’t used to having so much light in her eyes, but she couldn’t sleep more no matter how tired she was. She didn’t want to sleep more, really.

In the morning sun, she could see that her sister was awake. Her pink eyes were still dull, unresponsive, but if her older twin could be awake after everything they went through, she could too.

Another thing she noticed, now that she could see much better than last night; her sister’s hands were much worse off than she had realized. The bleeding was mostly staunched, though there was plenty of it staining her sister’s skirt, but the wounds themself... they were dirty, and the skin around them were inflamed.

Something pinged in her memory of that life she wanted to forget. A word said with deadly seriousness: infection.

She grabbed on to that word, tugging at the memories of her other self’s life, straining to recall anything about open wounds. A short memory, eventually, came to her; she had taken a short first aid seminar to fill a requirement in high school, and scrapes were one of the first things covered. Unresponsiveness was more difficult.

“I need... alcohol for the cuts, and clean bandages.”

She would need to prevent infection. That’s the most important thing, especially now that the bleeding had slowed some. She didn’t know what sort of medicine this world had, and even if these people were incredible doctors, she doubted she would be able to access it. If her sister’s bloody splinters became infected, she would likely lose her hands, and maybe even her life. That was not acceptable.

Looking around the abandoned building, she quickly spotted a clean looking piece of fabric hanging from an old curtain rail. It was a bit dusty, but a some quick shaking helped. Only the one side needed to touch the wounds, anyways, and the bottom of the cloth was dust free. It was better than her soaking, blood-and-sweat stained dress, at least, and she wasn’t exactly spoiled for options.

She quickly took her sister’s hands, gently wrapping them in part of the cloth. She hoped that would reduce the bleeding, for now.

Her sister didn’t react to her actions.

Next, she needed something to clean out the wounds. Clean water would be acceptable. Alcohol would be ideal.

“Looks like I’m going to have to leave you here for a bit sister. Don’t worry, I’ll be back soon.”

Kissing her sister on the forehead, she made her way out the hut and into the nearby town.
Stealing from an apothecary was surprisingly easy when you’re three years old. Not many people had paid much attention to her, as she stood close to another family and had hidden her dirty appearance by standing behind the parents the whole time.

After grabbing what she needed from the nearby shelves, she had waited for the perfect moment to sneak out the window and make her way through the market.

‘Maybe I should find sister an apple to eat? I think there was a saying regarding apples and doctors…’ she mused, making sure to stick from family to family and act as natural as possible.

A faint voice caught her attention, as she noticed a glowing stone on a sword in a blacksmith’s shop. It seemed to echo in a barely understandable but strong tongue, as the stone sparkled in the sunlight. Drawn to its beautiful voice, she listened to it spin tales of far off adventures and victories against foes. It reminded her a little of the stories her sister used to tell her when they were smaller and stuck inside that chest…

“What do you remember?” Her sister had asked one night, when the moon was full and peeked through the cracks of the lid.

“Beautiful large buildings with lights that sparkled like stars. Delicious cookies and sweets, with a sweet fluffy puppy.” she had replied, blinking back the tears that had threatened to spill.

Her sister had reached out in the darkness and gently, ever so gently stroked her hair as she had whispered, “Anything else?”

Like damn bursting, she had sobbed out, “…Kind parents who loved me.” Before spilling her parents story.

It had felt like hours had passed, with her sister listening patiently as she had told her every little thing that she could remember about them. Now that she had allowed herself to remember them, that was all she wanted to talk about when mentioning her past life. Her sister was so patient and understanding, even then. She had cuddled her close and just listened till her voice had gotten sore or that woman had screeched at them to shut up, kicking their little box in anger.

“What about you sis? What was your family like?” she had whispered, curious to know more about these warrior people, that had trained and raised her sister.

She recalled how the shadows had seemed to deepen around her sister’s face, as had slowly and quietly described her previous family. A loving but lazy father, a bossy yet kind mother, a well meaning but smothering twin brother and an energetic younger brother. She had friends too, who had been as close to family as possible.

“He had the same shade of blonde as us, with eyes more blue than a clear sunny sky. His name was Naruto, and he was the brother I chose.” Her sister had sounded so wistful, it had made something ache inside her.

“Just him?” She had asked, unable to keep her curiosity to herself, now that her sister was in a sharing mood.

“No. I had two more siblings, that I had picked and pulled into my family. One was much older, with hair silvery-white and dark deep eyes. His name was Kakashi and he was brilliant but a lazy pervert too. My last brother was the same age as me, with hair and eyes as dark as coal…”

She had never heard her sister speak so fondly, as she listened to her describe each and every family
member and friend. That was the first and only time her sister had spoken so much about the people that she had left behind.

It had left her feeling humbled at the trust and love her sister had shown her by revealing so much about whom she had been. She had sworn then and there that she would do everything in her power to be there for her sister just as she was there for her.

Snapping out of her daydream, she realized that an older man had been staring at her from window reflection. His face was white in shock and he seemed to be entranced at the sight of her. Making her way quickly through the thicker parts of the crowd, she began to run back to their hideout. She had a bad feeling about this man and wanted to get back to her sister as soon as possible. Sneaking under an arguing couple’s legs, she appeared to have lost the man in the crowd. Smiling triumphantly, she raced out of the town and towards the abandoned little hut, certain that soon everything would be alright.

“What did you say?”

Rolf slammed his tankard back down on the table, and looked the man who doubted him right in the eye.

“I told ya! There was a lil’ girl on the street that had pink eyes.”

Half the bar made noises of skepticism or disbelief, but no one turned away as he recounted his story again. Rolf’s tankard was filled when he lifted it again, but no one asked for his coin. Not when all anyone wanted was for him to continue his story.

“I know what I saw! It was jus’ a lil’ girl, barely more than a babe, in a scrappy brown dress. Coulda been any urchin off the street, though with that golden hair… well, I can’t see her being left on the street for long, ya know?” The men around him jeered, and Rolf basked in the way the room hung on his every word, and for riled by his little ‘jokes.’

“But then, well. She steps out of the crowd, right? Much more noticeable than when she looked like she was with her family. And she stares at those magic jewels ol’ Haygar has been trying to pawn down on Black Street. I can’t help but look at th’ little princess, and as soon as I did, well. Eyes half as big as her face, that one. How could I not see the pink? ‘Bout tripped over mine own two feet, I was so shocked. Shame, too. She noticed me, and scampered off before I could catch her.”

The crowd murmured in disappointment. Story ended, someone worked up the courage to speak up.

“Ya couldn’t possibly have seen right. The only people with eyes like that are his Lordship’s family. No way that demon has a little blond girl running around. The duchess has been dead for far too long, and you want me to believe that cold bastard took a mistress?”

Besides, everyone knows the Duke’s family always has black hair. And only black hair.”

The two men who challenged Rolf were sitting near each other in the crowd, and leaned closer to be able to clink their drinks together in agreement.

“That’s not true! There have been mixes with humans before!” an older man shouts from across the bar. “It was a big uproar in the palace when one showed up, back when I worked there as a youth, ‘cause the boy was eligible for the throne. Some big fight happened between the noble lords an’ the wizards an’ the emperor. The kid died young though. Very mysterious circumstances.” The old guard’s voice turned melancholy at the end of his statement, though the rest of the pub’s mood held.
The muttering grew louder around the bar. Some are disgusted by the idea that those demons could procreate with innocent human women. Others rolled their eyes at the idea the duke was a demon at all. Still, others debated what it would be like to have a half demon as emperor. More than a few loudly proclaimed this whole discussion was bunk, as Rolf clearly hadn’t seen the child properly.

Rolf was just about to stand up and defend his story, when a hand clamped on his shoulder. A plain looking young man was at Rolf’s side. He leaned close, so only Rolf could hear him.

“I believe you. And my master would too. Would you like to come with me, and earn some coin for your tale?”

“What did you say?!” Lord Martin demanded of his grubby informant. The man repeated himself, confirming that he had not misheard.

“Are you sure? Completely sure?”

The man nodded.

“Woulda come if I wasn’t.”

Lord Martin grimaced. He knew it was the truth. Too much was at stake, delivering such a rumor to his household in broad daylight. The Lord payed off the informant, his mind already thinking five steps ahead. Snapping his fingers for his scribe, he bade the boy to start writing out letters.

“Send a letter to the wizards, they must be notified. Also, make sure that Count Cervan doesn’t find out about this. Knowing that old fool, he’d go tell Duke Castielo before we could even finish gathering the man power necessary to find it.”

Striding back into his office, he began to scheme to ensure that he could get one of his sons as a candidate to attempt to impregnate that child when it’s of age.

“The power of the Castielo bloodline would rise my own family to heights unimaginable. I must get that girl!”

Down by the gates of his mansion, watching from the shadows, a young man in a brown cloak smirked as he heard the news of a pink eyed child wandering the streets unprotected. Whistling a merry tune, he casually made his way back into the markets, certain that things were going to get very interesting quickly.

“What did you say?!” A silver haired wizard slammed his hands on a cluttered desk as he stared incredulously at the page before him. “A mixed Castielo child was spotted?!”

“Yes. My Lord bid me to notify you as soon as he received the word.”

The wizard chuckled softly, before belting out his laughter in joy.

“Finally! The moment we have been waiting for has arrived! The power and secrets of the Castielo will be ours to discover and explore. Ohhh our Lord will be most pleased with such a sacrifice.”

Making his way to the window, he scribbled a note on a piece of parchment before tying it to a raven and throwing it into the air.

“Ahem. Now then, who was it who bid you to come again?” He coughed, trying to regain his
composure and be the refined wizard everyone thought him to be.

“My Lord Martin, sir.”

“...Lord Martin eh? Well, I can’t deny he has certainly done us wizards a favour...so what does your master want boy?” The wizard rubbed his chin absently, wondering what kind of favour that noble was angling for.

“A chance for one of his sons to pass their seed unto the child, and to keep the result of that union for their family line, sir.”

Smiling broadly at the words, the wizard leaned back into his chair, as he started to write down his ideas for what kind of experiments they should start with once the child was in their possession.

“...Well should she survive to a child bearing age, I can’t see why not to grant his wish. Tell your Lord we have a deal; he helps us catch that child and his son gets a chance to impregnate the mixed breed.”

“A pleasure doing business with you, sir. My Lord will be most pleased.”

Pouring himself a glass of wine, the wizard smiled as the page made his way out of the room. Soon, very soon, all his theories and plans would be all that much closer to reality.

End of Chapter 2
You should be able to follow this without much help, but in case you haven't read one or the other of these niche fandoms:

Summary of Dreaming of Sunshine: The main character, Shikako, is reborn from our world into the world of Naruto. She is Shikamaru's twin sister, of the Nara clan, so she can manipulate shadows. She also has a connection to the god-entity Gelel, which she communes with from a stone she wears as a necklace, and whom she can find by following music she can hear.

Summary of I am a Child of this House: Estelle is a reborn woman from Korea who was horribly confined and abused by her mother. When her father— the terrifying Duke Castielo— learns of her existence, she is quickly brought into his household, and educated as a Lady, while also slowly unravelling the secrets of her Family's line, of magic, and of the country itself.

36 hours and 55 minutes. That's how long it took for him to find out that he might have a daughter lost among the streets of this cesspit. And that’s only if you don’t count the apparent years she’s lived without him.

There have been few women that he's willingly allowed himself to sleep with, making the list of potential candidates small. One of those wretched whores had kept his child away from him. Should any harm befall his daughter, he swore that he would ensure that they will suffer it tenfold.

Since his daughter was spotted in this area, that meant that bitch should be around here too.

“There's only one whore I know who haunts this town.”

He rode his horse up to a simple looking building. He burst through the doors, ignoring the stuttering and blubbering nothings of the pests around him. Memory of the wretch boasting of her beautiful rooms by a balcony had him striding up the stairs to the second floor and breaking down every door on the floor. Screaming and embarrassed couples hid from him, as he searched through the rooms, blocking out their dribble.

Finally he found the room where a faintly familiar blonde haired woman lay, legs spread for some worthless noble. Pulling out his sword he rammed it against the headboard, frightening the noble into shoving the whore of him and scrambling to grab his clothes and get out.

Ignoring the quivering pounds of flesh, Ein glared at the annoyed woman staring defiantly from the bed.

“That is mahogany!”

“Where is she?” he growled, not even caring that she screeched, trying to cover herself with her bedsheets.

“You wretched, pathetic excuse of a man! How dare you come into my home and stab your
overcompensating sword into my expensive headboard and—"

Her voice grated on his nerves. Perhaps on another day he'd try and be diplomatic. But it had been 37 hours now since his daughter was spotted and then went missing, yet this whore didn't even seem to care.

Yanking his sword out, he grabbed her by the hair and dragged her off the bed and against the wall. Pinning her with his blade, he loomed over her menacingly.

“Cut the crap, you know why I’m here. Now. Where. Is. She?”

The bitch squawked and screeched, barely making any noises resembling human speech. Digging his blade closer to her flesh, she finally started to quiet down as the edge of it caused her to bleed slightly.

“Gone! And good riddance too! A drain on my money and a waste of my time. Do you have any idea how hard I had to work to get my body back in shape after that?”

‘Useless,’ he thought, ‘A complete waste of my time.’

Moving away from the naked annoyance, he began to search the room for clues. There, hidden under an expensive looking rug, were obvious blood stains in the shape of little hands. Near the balcony door, partially hidden by a heavy looking curtain, were the remains of a wooden chest, with blood stains around the broken lid.

The story told by these small clues was so horrible, his mind wasn’t able to process it at first. But after a moment, an understanding of what his child must have suffered sunk in.

Duke Casteilo saw red.

Kelson waited nervously outside the brothel, determinedly ignoring the sounds of destruction coming from inside, as well as the many people streaming out in various states of undress. None of that mattered. Not compared to a possible missing Castielo child. Kelson understood, perhaps better than anyone, how important it was that they found the little Mixed child first.

If they were lucky, she would be in this brothel with her mother, or the woman would at least know where she is now. If they were not, well... The destruction Kelson knew was happening inside was only the beginning.

A man stepped through the front door of the brothel and into the night; the darkness a physical manifestation around his body. Kelson’s heart sank. Whatever the Duke had found, the news was not good. Kelson scrambled with the horses and led the Duke’s stallion towards him. With His Grace in this sort of mood, every moment counted.

Duke Casteilo didn’t even look at his aid as he roughly took the reins and swung himself up on the horse, clearly single-minded.

He did, however, pause to give Kelson instructions as he left.

“I’m going to join the search. Take care of this mess. I don’t care what it costs, just make sure it doesn’t get in the way.”
The duke turned and galloped away, not even waiting to see the bow of acknowledgement his servant gave at the instructions.

Kelson politely ignored the small smear of blood he saw on the duke’s gloves, then turned to do his duty.

The streets were filled with people, despite the early predawn hour.

Many of them were Wolves, the Duke’s personal knighthood, but not enough. Too many of them were aligned with other noble houses, or even with the Magic Tower. Commander Astor Winds didn’t like it. If the wrong people found his Lord’s daughter… well, death would be the kindest fate she could meet.

The Magic Tower, in particular, was a concern. If certain noble houses found the child, they might try to keep her, but at least His Grace still had the chance to find her, to rescue her. But if the wizards got ahold of her… even if everyone in the whole country knew they had the girl, Commander Winds was not certain they could save her. Not even the emperor would be able to order that they return her. So, allowing those bastards to get ahold of her was not an option.

That was why he had every single person under his command, from the lowest young squire all the way up to himself, searching the town and the surrounding forest where the rumoured Lady was said to have been spotted.

‘Sir! I have a message from one of our squires.’

“Report.”

“There have been sightings of suspicious men, probably mercenaries, entering the woods nearby the town.”

“Damn it! Get some of our best trackers to follow those men! We cannot underestimate them and hope that they won’t find the young Lady before we do.”

“Y-yes sir!”

Cursing under his breath, he barked out orders for his men to work faster. The rats had started to move and every second counted. No one could be allowed to find the Lady without them knowing. Especially not mercenaries, who would certainly be working for the wizards, or as assassins at best. They wouldn’t even get a chance to ransom the target if those men found her unopposed.

Astor grimaced, realizing what he had to do. He barked orders at his remaining men, ordering them to hurry, and rearranging those he could to provide more manpower for the forest search squad.

The Duke had recently returned from tracking his… lead on the Lady’s whereabouts, and now was nearly single-handedly covering the westerly side of town. Astor could tell the Duke was desperate to find his daughter; the man’s Aura whipped around him the way Astor had only ever seen on the direst of battlefields.

A part of Astor could not blame the mercenaries for deciding to move on towards the forest now. No one working against the Duke would want to risk crossing paths with him in such a mood. With the Duke tearing through the westerly district, the forest would start to seem much more appealing to those mercenary scum.
Those wretches would need to break into groups since the woods spanned a lot of lands and surrounded the east border of the village. Considering the small size of that party, Commander Winds figured three squads would be enough to shadow and overtake them if they had to.

Astor prayed that the Lady would be discovered by their squad, and soon.

Sunrise was near, and their already difficult job would become even more so as the townspeople began to bustle about their day. Time was running out, come daybreak the market would flood with people, and any hope they had of saving the little Lady would be lost to the wind.

Sunshine peeked through the broken roof and rained down on her warm face. Slowly opening her eyes, she realized her sister was sleeping curled up against her. She no longer looked like a broken doll, staring lifelessly at a wall.

She gently checked her sister's hands, noticing that the inflammation had gone down a bit.

Tears stung her eyes, and she giggled softly in relief, ‘She’s going to be ok. I did it...I helped her and it worked.’

Sniffling back her tears, she quickly checked her twin’s temperature before worrying that she might be a little too warm. Quietly detangling herself from her sister’s embrace, she grabbed a piece of the clean cloth and placed a wet strip on her sister’s forehead.

‘If she’s going to get better then she’s going to need food.’ Looking over their supplies, she softly sighed in dismay at the sight of a single apple left. She had been so hungry last night, and so worried about her sister not eating well, that she hadn't thought to ration their meagre stolen food properly.

‘I got away with stealing yesterday, but I guess I should be more careful today and search in the woods for stuff to eat,’ she pondered.

Toddling over to a clean looking puddle of water, she quickly splashed her face with cold water and tried to clean her brown dress as much as possible. Tying a brown looking rag over her head, she tried to hide her too noticeable golden hair. Looking a bit more put together, she made her way back to her sister. She moved a little bit of the rubble around, obscuring the corner her sister was laying in, and making it difficult to see her if you weren’t looking. That would have to do.

“Bye sis, I’ll be back soon. Promise.” She gave a parting kiss on her head.

Making her way into the woods she kept close to the shadows and thick bushes, noticing that there were more footprints on the main road since yesterday.

‘I thought this area was abandoned...so why are there so many footprints today?’

Feeling uneasy, she braved on, reminding herself that her sister needed food to get better and was counting on her to help.

She was so focused on staying hidden, she didn’t see the young man in a brown cloak smirk at her from the shadows, matching her step for step.

Huffing and puffing in exhaustion, a young boy dressed in plain looking clothes leaned against an old tree. He had been running around all morning in the woods, trying to keep an eye on those mercenaries with his aura.
The whole task was very exhausting, causing him to have to stop and replenish his reserves by tracking the old fashioned way. They seemed to have found a possible trail and had been following it intently for half an hour or so, and now had finally paused, seemingly to regroup. Emel hoped that meant they had lost the trail, or that they realized that they had been following the wrong trail the whole time. He couldn’t risk losing them, but he also didn’t know what a new squire like him would do if they found the rumoured Lady. He would have to do his best, he supposed, little as that was, and hope the commotion attracted his allies before the Lady was lost.

He wished, not for the first time, that one of the real knights was here.

Ignoring such pessimistic thoughts, Emel decided to take advantage of the short break. He pulled out a half squished roll of bread, he crouched low and nibbled on it, keeping an eye on the mercenaries just a few feet ahead. They had huddled together to look at something on the ground there.

Emel threw the last bite of bread into his mouth just as the mercenary group left their huddle. They quickly spread out, now intently searching the forest flora around them, rather than sticking to just the least-dense paths. Emel crouched lower behind a tree and focused on being as quiet as possible. One of the mercenaries was coming this way.

A light rustle broke his concentration, as the leaves behind him shifted quietly. Crawling towards the bush, he peeked through the leaves.

A pair of pink eyes looked back at him.

Glancing back, he could see that the mercenary had noticed the rustling too. The large man was headed their way. Emel made a split second decision.

He lunged forward, abandoning stealth, and scooped the tiny girl up in his arms. He ignored the shout and the voices that were now rushing after him. He focused only on protecting the delicate child in his arms and pushing himself for every bit of speed he could muster.

He had a slight advantage, being small enough to slip through the trees, and not wearing any sort of heavy armour. Even so, he was only ten years old, and he was tired. He wasn’t losing his pursuers. If anything, they were gaining.

“-eft.”

A muffled noise came from the light — too light — bundle in his arms, causing him to almost trip over his own two feet.

“Huh?” He looked down bewildered to see a determined little face glaring up at him.

“Go left!”

Following her directions on instinct, Emel quickly found himself an abandoned hut. The little Lady wiggled out of his arms and toddled her way inside, waving at him to hurry up.

She seemed to almost merge with the shadows as she crawled and hid among the debris of the roof.

“In here, quickly!”

Crawling behind her, they both covered their mouths as the mercenaries made their way inside the building. Emel barely dared to breathe, they came so close.

“Where’d they go?”
“I thought you ‘er watching where they went?”

“Well they hafta be in here somewhere!”

Their footsteps grew louder, as they slowly made their way in the room, kicking and pushing the debris over.

Just when Emel thought they would be discovered, a loud snap and a harsh scream echoed in the room.

“What was that?! Louie you ok?!”

More footsteps grew closer, followed by more snap-snap sounds and harsh screaming followed by heavy thumps.

He crept forward to see what had happened. Thin, worn ropes had been placed around the room, causing weak pieces of the debris to fall on the mercenaries whenever they triggered a trap. It was simple but very effective considering they were stuck in a small enclosed space.

“It looks like they’ve all been dealt with,” Emel turned and gave the huddled blonde child a little half bow, as he smiled gently at the curious pink eyes watching him.

“How do you do M’Lady. My name is Emel Astrada, and I am one of your father’s squires. He has been very worried and looking for you. It’s not safe here, so come with me ok? I promise to make sure you make it back to your family.”

The young Lady bit her lip, but, with a glance at his sword, eventually nodded.

Reaching out slowly, he carefully placed a hand on her shoulders and another under her knees. Lifting her back into his arms, he started to carry her out of the room when a heavy object smacked him on the back of his head.

His last thought was his frustration at failing the duke and the little Lady in his arms.

“R...u...n….” he mumbled before losing consciousness.

Hugo grinned as he watched the boy crumpled under his blow. He had always been the strongest of the group, being able to lift rocks and boulders with ease. That brat thought he was so clever, leading them into a trap like this. Too bad for him, he didn’t realize old Hugo was guarding the entrance and thus didn’t fall like his other idiot comrades.

“And now, there’s no one to stop me from getting all the reward money! What luck!” he chuckled gleefully, keeping his stance as threatening as possible. The toddler trembled and stared up at him with watery pink eyes, curling into herself and staying close to the unconscious boy.

“Well now, you are the sorriest little street urchin, I’ve ever did see. Still, at least you are going to fetch a pretty price from those wizards. I wonder how much they will pay just to get their hands on you in one piece?”

The scruffy little girl turned her body to run but was no match for the grown man lunging after her. He easily overpowered her tiny, weak body, despite her trying to put up a fight. She almost managed to bite him, but he pulled her tight to his body, holding her too close to kick, squirm, or bite at him again.
She quickly realized it was futile. The squirming bundle in his arms went limp as she changed tactics.

“W-what do you want from m-me? I’m just an orphan.”

“Yer not some orphan, *Sweetheart*. Even if ya really do think it’s true. Yer daddy’s a big bad man, and I’m going to be paid *handsomely* for getting ahold of his baby girl.”

“If my father is so scary,” all hesitation is gone from her voice, proving that her previous pleas were just an act, “then maybe you should be more afraid of hurting me.”

“Bwahaha! And a true Castielo! You’re just a small runt, yet yer talking like that? God no wonder your family is revered more feared. God, that rumour about your kind having demon blood must be true.”

“Wha-?”

“Don’t you know little Lady? Your father and his family has always kept a tight control over their blood. Especially as that cursed family shrunk with every generation. Yet he fucked up! And now you’re all mine!”

“...Heh. Not likely asshole.”

Looking down at her in befuddlement, Hugo felt a sharp pain in his gut, which brought him to his knees.

The pink-eyed brat took a step back and away from his loose arms, smiling pleased as can be with a bloody dagger in her bandaged hands.

“H..How? I had won..yer just a brat.” He cupped his stomach, trying to futility keep his innards inside. Hugo felt his vision start to fade as the sun cast shadows on the child’s face, giving her a truly demonic look in his dying mind.

“Don’t flatter yourself. You were never more than a way to get more information.” She replied, all innocence gone as she spoke confidently with perfect posture. Collapsing to the floor, Hugo watched his blood pool out from under him. He was dead before he could see how the girl slumped and started to limp away, dagger falling from her limp bloody fingers to the ground.

End of Chapter 3
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

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Summary of I am a Child of this House: Estelle is a reborn woman from Korea who was horribly confined and abused by her mother. When her father- the terrifying Duke Castielo - learns of her existence, she is quickly brought into his household, and educated as a Lady, while also slowly unravelling the secrets of her Family's line, of magic, and of the country itself.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 4

“A daughter!!”

Delicate porcelain shattered against the wall. The shards fell to the carpet, joining a pile of other debris that was victim to the Empress’ rage.

“How could he have a daughter?!!”

More delicate trinkets shattered under her hands, but she didn’t care. She wanted to break something. The silly baubles her husband tried to appease her with were a good start.

“To think that man… with some common whore!”

She paced a circuit around the room again, searching for anything else to soothe her rage. She had been right there, a prize fit for a king, and that blasted man hadn’t so much as glanced her way. She had comforted herself, so sure it was loyalty to his duchess, or perhaps a general disinterest in women. But no. Right at the same time she made her rejected overtures, he had been out whoring in the slums.

Had perhaps slept with that bitch numerous times, if she managed to conceive. Had held her and loved her and given her his greatest treasure… It burned, deeply. How dare he. That child should have been theirs, should have been hers-

...Wait.

The child could still be hers.
Kicking a broken jewelry box out of her way, the queen stepped out into the common area of her apartments. She motioned with a quick flick of her hand for her maids to enter and clean up the destruction in her bedroom. Another gesture summoned her personal aid to join her in her study.

“I want you to — *discreetly* — send out directions to the usual crowd. Let them know I will pay them twice what the Wizards or the Duke would if they find the girl. And pressure the nobles to hand her over if they acquire her; I’ll ensure a favourable marriage for their sons in her place. The Little Miss will likely be the next Empress, after all. It’s only natural that I should have a hand in raising and educating her.”

‘And if her father wants to see her, he can negotiate his visits with me,’ she thought smugly.

Her aid bowed in acknowledgement then turned for the door at her implicit dismissal. He’d been her right hand for years, so he knew this was a matter she would want to be resolved with the utmost urgency.

As he placed his hand on the doorknob, she added one more directive before he could open the door that guarded their secrecy.

“Oh, and track down that man’s other whores. Check for other children, and then eliminate them.”

As far as the Queen was concerned, if Duke Castielo wouldn’t have her, he couldn’t have any woman.

He’d been watching her forage wild mushrooms, berries and other fruit for over a few hours. Twice now he had to intervene and quietly kill any other competition looking for her. Such a small delicate child; the pitiable thing looked like a strong gust of wind would break her.

Her pink eyes seemed to almost glow in the sunlight, her blonde hair carefully hidden under her bandana.

Hiding in the branches of a tall oak tree, he quickly spotted another opponent making his way closer to where the child was crawling in the bush.

Drawing out an arrow, he silently released it, smirking at the sight of the man falling dead with an arrow in his throat. Quick and efficient. That was his way of dealing with things.

Slinking down the tree, he threw some rocks and spooked the child into moving locations. It was getting too busy in this area. Too many rats scurrying about and trying to steal his target.

‘Soon this will all be over and I will have my reward.’ He smiled eagerly as she ran further into the woods and away from the town border. It looked like she was circling back to that abandoned shack.

‘Excellent. By the time she makes it back there, she’ll be too exhausted from carrying the food and walking so much.’ He stifled a chuckle at her little awkward waddling, signs that her legs and thighs were rubbed sore from all the exercise she had done, obviously not used to such physical excursions.

Creeping from tree to tree, he made sure to silently kill any other rat hunting nearby.

‘What a hassle, I must remind myself to ask for thrice the amount of reward after all this.’ He thought silently, continuing to match the small child, step for step.

It would be so much easier to just scoop the child up now, but secrecy was his most valuable asset. Furthermore, his instructions were clear; he could take any actions necessary against their opposition,
but he was not to harm or traumatize the child. So, the cat and mouse game continued.

“Commander Winds, sir! A report from tracking team two. The child was spotted by a civilian around the woods near the southeast border of the town. They are attempting to pursue, but have been slowed down by the number of enemy mercenaries in the area. The report on their number was wrong and they are now stuck in combat with them.”

“Another report from tracking team five, sir! They found evidence that one of our squires found the child deep in the woods and was chased north by mercenaries. They’re in pursuit now, but the trails are jumbled, and none are within Aura range.”

Commander Winds snapped at the knights that the child couldn't be in two opposite directions at the same time. Clearly one of these reports was wrong. Whether by mistake, or intentional diversions from their enemies, Astor prayed that the wizards weren't actually involved with this just yet. If they were up against illusions… if they couldn’t trust their information network... then their one advantage — manpower — would become a liability instead.

Blast it all!

Astor considered the two reports, assessing their viability, and comparing it to his available manpower. He needed to allocate sufficient resources to investigate both, without weakening the rest of the search so much that gaps were created that could allow the Lady to slip through their fingers. It was an impossible choice. There just wasn’t enough time, or men, to cover everything.

“Sir! We have another report! An Illial was spotted waiting in a glen in the woods. That must mean that a wizard is close by the area!”

‘No!’ Astor thought, ‘We need more time!’

Barely swallowing a snarl, he ordered the knights around him, “Notify the Duke! At this point, only he can deal with the wizards. Also, mobilize the troops closest to that area. Let's find out what those bastards are up to.”

Watching the two knights rush to follow his orders, Commander Winds used his Aura to remove the faint fatigue from his body. Typically such techniques would sap his stamina. However, since he would not be physically leading this exhibition, he could afford to sacrifice some of his energy for a sharper mind.

‘I must remain in top condition for his grace and the little Miss.’

Snapping his fingers he summoned a scribe to start writing new orders for the various troops searching the town. It was time to close quarters on those rats and end this hunt, and by the power of the gods, he swore he would not fail the Hope for the future of House Castilo, and through her, the Empire itself.

Waiting in the glen for his master to come back, Ten stared at the sky and watched the bluebirds fly off over the clouds. His long red hair was tangled and greasy, giving his face an even more gaunt look.

‘I wonder...if my master died today, would I be free?’ Ten had been kicked around and beaten up that day by both his master and the mercenaries accompanying him. He had failed in tracking down the child and was instead being used as a diversion for the knights in the area.
'I want to die. God in heaven, please, please end my suffering.' Dead green eyes stared blankly, as he pressed his hands against his chest and felt the broken ribs left behind from his master’s ‘tender care’.

No one would care if Ten died; Illial were hated and seen as less than human by the people in this country. And no Illial would mistake to think their masters cared for them as more than tools. It was a terribly lonely existence, causing many slaves to die of a broken spirit.

Ten could hear the jingling of metal slowly make it's way closer to him. That must be the demon Duke’s knights. Pulling out a rolled up parchment, Ten wondered what would happen when he opened it. His master had been very clear that the moment he was surrounded by the knights he was to open the scroll and activate the magical array.

‘Will this hurt me if I open it? Will I die and be free?’ he pondered, stroking the rough material with his thumb.

It was a new spell, bound inside the parchment and only possible to activate through a blood sacrifice.

Leaning against the grass, Ten closed his eyes and breathed in the world around him. What a wretched place, this disgusting world had given him nothing but despair and agony.

‘I hate this world, and everyone inside it. I wish it would all just disappear.’

Pulling out a small knife, Ten heard the knights start to surround him and ask him where his master was. Cutting his hands, he smeared his bloody palms against the bound parchment, causing it to glow and reveal a magic seal.

Recognizing the seal and what it meant, Ten sobbed a little before staring up at the blue sky.

‘...I wish that the next time I am born, I’ll be a beautiful bluebird, flying free over the clouds.’

Closing his eyes, he slowly counted to five; he didn’t manage to reach the number four before the scroll glowed brightly and then -

BOOM!

The sound of the explosion shook the whole land, as animals and people alike ran out of the woods in a blind panic. The fire was spreading from tree to bush, making it dangerous for men and creatures to enter its fiery blaze.

Ein glared as his horse refused to enter the burning woods, neighing and rearing back in fright. Jumping off the beast’s back, the Duke ran into the hell pit, neatly jumping over and avoiding falling burning branches. He could sense it, a very faint and weak aura, similar yet different to that of his son’s.

‘That must be her. My daughter.’ He thought, stepping over the corpses of those unable to escape the explosion in time or who had died from the smoke and heat. His bloodline and mastery over his Aura protected him from such human weaknesses.

Warping his Aura around his body, he ran faster into the smoke. Up ahead there was a group of mercenaries choking and arguing over whether they should stay and find the girl - his daughter - or leave and live to see another day.
Pulling out his sword, he quickly decapitated the leader before stabbing the second in command in the gut. Yanking it roughly, he slashed another’s throat and stabbed the last member in the eye. Not even slowing down, he continued to cut down every mercenary and Illial he came across. No wizards, unfortunately. Their blood would have helped satisfy his burning anger.

39 hours since his daughter had been spotted and the hunt had begun. 3 hours since he managed to hunt down that bitch and tore apart a sector of the town. 30 minutes since he entered this hell forest trying to find her.

‘15 minutes. The fire is spreading too fast and burning too harshly to be a normal fire. I have 15 minutes to find my daughter or else all trace of her will be burned away.’ Tsking, Ein pushed his Aura forward and smothered the fire, creating a path for him to use.

He could sense his daughter’s aura cracking away, pushed past the limits of exhaustion and into the breaking point.

‘10 minutes left. I have to hurry.’ He gnashed his teeth in frustration and forced even more of his Aura around his legs.

Picking up the pace, he made his way to a section close to the west border of the village, where a pathetic looking shack, crumbling and abandoned to time and the elements, stood. Thankfully, the fire had yet to reach the building, though a young man in a brown cloak was stabbing and killing the mercenaries outside of the house.

Ein glared at the annoyances. The young man quickly stabbed his opponent and immediately pointed to the inside of the building before backing away as far as possible from the house, and booking it towards the direction of the village.

A final flare of that weak aura before it died down completely froze his heart in terror. The young man was unimportant, what truly mattered was saving his child. Using his sword, he began to hack and kick his way in. More than a few of the beings he destroyed merely dissolved into dust. Magic.

And three hooded figures had just stepped into the shack. The ice shattered as his heart howled in determined fury.

‘5 minutes left. I’m going to win.’

She had long since realized something was wrong.

It was the little oddities that tipped her off. High foot traffic, the sense of being watched, the odd worried voices that felt like they echoed in her heart more than her ears… But her sister needed food. They both did. And she couldn’t run and hide at the first sign of trouble when her sister was counting on her.

So she had pressed on, carefully avoiding the warriors who carried the echoing voices. Something was deeply, deeply worrying those voices. Something that made them as determined as her sister had been when they were trapped in that chest, the water level rising-

She shook her head, pushing such thoughts away. Not now. She needed to focus. She couldn’t lose herself again here.

Something rustled in the bushes up ahead of her, something she still couldn’t identify, even though it seemed to be stalking her. She changed directions again, desperate to throw her unseen pursuer off her trail. Food wasn’t worth it anymore. She had enough. It would have to be enough. Because she couldn’t stay here. She had to get back to her sister before she was caught.
She waddled delicately back in the direction of the hut, ignoring the pain in her legs. She carefully avoided the roaming warriors thanks to the not-voices that followed them. There were no further suspicious rustles in the bushes, so she assumed she had managed evade that threat, at least.

She forced herself to maintain her cautious pace. As much as she wanted to get back to her sister right now, she couldn’t risk running into danger, or leading danger back to the hut-

An explosion ripped through the forest behind her, tossing her forward, into the dirt. She shook her head, trying to clear the ringing in her ears, forcing herself to her feet. She abandoned her small bundle of food and caution, racing towards the abandoned hut. Towards her sister. The fire that followed behind her was just incidental at that point. Everything was already too much, what was one more horror?

She burst into the small hut, only to find that things we not as she left them.

Bodies scattered the floor — large ones, thankfully, not her sister — and there was more debris than ever before. She started to panic, but then she spotted her sister.

Her precious sister was slumped in the center of the room, near one of the larger bodies. The makeshift bandages around her hands were pink, with spots of red; clearly, the wounds on her hands had reopened. Worse, though, was the odd angle of her sister’s foot.

“Sister!”

Thankfully, her sister turned her head at the sound of her voice. She locked on to those big, beautiful pink eyes, and nearly cried in relief; the light had returned to them. Everything else momentarily forgotten, she threw herself at her sister. Her sister caught her and returned the hug. For a brief, wonderful moment, she ignored everything else and enjoyed the rightness of being in her sister’s arms.

But of course, it didn’t last.

The fire that blazed outside was flushing people out of the forest. She could hear the growing sounds of shouting and fighting outside.

Her sister pushed her away, and urgently whispered, “This isn’t a coincidence, these people are here for us. You have to leave.”

“I’m not leaving you!” Her voice was too loud, too shrill, but she couldn’t contain herself. How could her sister suggest such a thing? She wasn’t going to leave her! “I’ll help you up, we can find a new safe place.”

Her sister shook her head. “There’s no time. I’m too tired. Too hurt. I can’t sneak out of here. Please. Please go…”

“I won’t leave you!”

“Then at least hide!” Black ribbons whipped out from her sister’s body with that last shout. She was knocked back by the force of them. She hit the far wall with a thump, and the wind got knocked out of her. Stunned, she tried to stand back up but stumbled. Her muscles screamed and gave out from underneath her, no longer able to overcome her injuries through pure force of will. She fell back and landed on something much softer than expected.

Hidden behind this pile of rubble with her, was a boy. He seemed to still be alive, unlike the other bodies here. His eyes were slightly open, if unfocused. He didn’t seem to be a threat. He was
wearing the same colours as the warriors-with-the-worried-Voices. She wasn’t able to process more than that before the door to the hut was broken down.

Her sister had acted just in time; three hooded figures stepped through the door frame. She fought for breath in the face of their overwhelming presences.

Black ribbons raised themselves protectively around her sister. They pushed the men, and their oppressive heaviness, back. She gulped for air and tried again to stand. She failed.

Her sister was going pale, the combination of pain and exhaustion clearly weighing on her.

‘Get up,’ she told herself. ‘Get up!’ She pushed herself up to her hands and knees.

The men pushed back against the dark ribbons, and after a moment, the shadows shattered. The men laughed, crowing in victory as they lunged forward towards her sister, she could feel their evil intentions, she knew they would hurt her! And then-

The men were slaughtered before they could take another step. It was so sudden that for a moment she doubted her own eyes. A fourth man had arrived. He stood tall and proud. A black mist whipped around him. He was furious, she could tell, the air literally screamed with it, and once more, she tried to stand.

The man looked around the hut and went inhumanly still as his eyes locked on to her sister. Her sister stared back. Tension left her sister’s body, as pink eyes stared into red ones.

The man stepped forward and reached for her sister, and finally, she forced her body to move, despite its objections. The man made it to her sister first, and she cried out in frustration as he… dropped his sword, and scooped her sister into a hug.

He held her sister like she was someone precious.

The screaming in the air had stopped, replaced by a relief that made her want to sob. He cradled her sister in his arms, seemingly oblivious to the world around him… except for one thing.

At her shout, he looked up, and red eyes locked with pink again. She watched the symphony of emotions flicker over his face, how his eyes widened and, finally, watched as he moved.

A moment later, she was engulfed into a warm chest, the man holding her and her sister tightly in his arms.

The sounds of fire and fighting could still be heard outside, but that seemed distant now.

She didn’t know yet who this man was, or why he held them like some kind of precious treasure. She didn’t understand anything that was happening. But she did know one thing. Here, cradled with her sister in this man’s arms, she felt loved.

End of Chapter 4

Chapter End Notes

Authors Notes: Ok guys, Math and I have unfortunately a lot of RL stuff happening so this fast pace updating is going to slow down. We just can't keep up churning chapters
like this on a daily basis. So here is your last speedy update! I hope you enjoy! Thank you again for your reviews, fanart, kudos, bookmarks and feedback. It has been super inspiring for us. Like literally all this support is what pushed us to do three more chapters in a row after the first one was posted! You all have been so amazing and I hope you continue to support this fanfiction!
Chapter 5

There she was, just as described. A scruffy, pink-eyed, dingy, little angel.

His angel.

She was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. While she had the woman's hair colour, that was where the similarities ended. She had his grandmother's eye shape and his mother's chin. Her cheekbones were his father's and weren't they strange to see on a little girl's face. That mouth was his great aunts but that core of steel, that toughness to survive, that was his.

Slowly stepping forward, he noticed her body language screaming she was prepared to stab him, arms pulled back for a quick yet deadly attack, stance solid and sheer force of will keeping her standing.

‘Good girl,’ he thought fondly. ‘Never let your guard down unless you are absolutely certain you are safe.’ Stepping over one of the dead wizard rats who thought hiding behind the Castielo house colours would save him, he silently amended his previous thought. ‘And even then keep a knife on you always.’

Carefully flaring his Aura, he gently wrapped it around her frayed, cracked one. Slowly her little body began to relax as he grew closer to where she stood.

As soon as he was close enough, he dropped his sword pulled her into a strong hug.

‘She's right here. She's safe... I won't lose a child tonight.’

Her body felt so frail under his hands; he could count her ribs and feel her bones. She was heavily leaning on him now, using him as a crutch for her wounded ankle. Her hair was brittle and dull, she
had barely any nutrients in her body. It was a pitiful state even for a normal child. For a daughter of the Castielo house...

Rage at what she had suffered, what that whore had done to his child, flared in his heart. There could never possibly be retribution enough for this. He was careful not to squeeze her in his fury, though. He was pretty sure even a human could crush this delicate little treasure, never mind someone like himself. He would have to be incredibly careful, perhaps for the rest of her life, not to cause her harm.

A soft cry snapped him out of his dark thoughts. He looked up to see another pair of pink eyes staring at him in shock.

His heart rose to his throat as he stared in disbelief at the little girl in front of him, identical to the one in his arms. He blinked his eyes, once then twice, just to be sure he wasn't seeing things. This shouldn't be possible. It had to be another one of those rat bastards’ illusions. But no, she was still there, even when he probed her with his aura. An illusion would have popped, but she didn't disappear. She was real, just as real as the delicate treasure already in his arms. His little miracle.

This was the reason why the reports were so mixed up and wrong. This was why he could sense another aura similar to the daughter in his arms, in the little girl before him.

‘Twins…’ Eyes widening in disbelief, he slowly recentered himself as what that meant sunk in.

He reached for his second little angel, and she didn’t resist his touch. Carefully, delicately, he pulled her into his arms as well. She was just as frail as her sister, her twin, which he loathed. But, there was time to deal with that later. He needed just a moment to hold them, to convince himself that they were real and alive. His precious daughters. His.

They curled into his arms and clasped at his coat with their tiny thin hands. One of his daughters had such a gentle and trusting aura, while the other had a more skeptical and jaded feel, though she was just as gentle.

Rocking them gently in his embrace, they slowly grew heavier in his arms till they fell into an exhausted sleep. Cuddling them close to his chest, he smiled gently as he kissed each daughter on the top of their heads.

He was not so lost in his new world that he forgot his surroundings. The approaching fire roared
loudly, almost overpowering a scraping sound, followed by a low groan from the side of the room. Ein gracefully leapt to his feet, careful not to jostle his sleeping daughters. He turned his body slightly and readied his aura so he was prepared for a fight. His fragile children were shielded by his body. If one of these bastards yet lived…

“Mlay-dee?” a hoarse voice croaked. “M’lady?!” it came again, a little stronger this time. A head popped up from behind the pile of debris his second daughter had been hiding behind. It was a young boy, in the colours of the Wolf’s Knighthood. One of his men. His hair was mussed, with a little blood matted into it, and his eyes were slightly crossed.

“M’lord… forgive me… I let myself be ambushed… and now I’m seeing doubles of the little Miss...”

His words slurred, but at least they were coherent. He probably doesn’t have a debilitating concussion then.

Clearly, the boy had found one of his daughters but was knocked out before he could take her to safety. And the first thing he did after regaining consciousness, despite the pain he must have been feeling, was to look for her. Ein makes a mental note of the boy. Devotion like that will be more important than ever now that he has such vulnerable treasures to protect.

The boy’s appearance also reminded Ein that this location is not safe; on top of the mercenaries, a roaring wildfire is bearing down on them. He needed to get them all — his daughters, himself, and this loyal squire — out of here immediately.

“Come, squire,” he gestured at the boy, watching bemusedly as he wobbled and swayed behind him.

Making his way outside of the pitiful shack, the Duke thought back to the woman who had dared put his daughters and himself through hell with her grasping greed.

“That wretched bitch…”

Keeping a steady pace, he made his way through the burning woods, using his Aura to protect his daughters and squire. As if a little flame could harm him or those in his care; truly wizards are annoyances that should be squashed like the bugs they are.

Commander Winds stared intently down at the city map. After two hours, they had just managed to
get the forest fire under control and had set up a healing tent for those burned by the flames and
smoke. They had been taken off guard by the wizards and suffered for it.

He rubbed the bridge of his nose tiredly and marked down another casualty. Reviewing the numbers,
he sighed despairingly. They had lost a full squadron where the blast had originated, many more had
been injured, either in the fire or in the confusion of the fight that followed. Additionally, a number
of knights and squires were still missing in action. As the fire raged, despite their and the town’s best
efforts to contain it, the chances of those missing being able to survive the blaze dropped every
minute.

In addition, they had lost all accounting for the Duke and the little Lady. The Duke would be fine, he
was sure. That man had suffered worse and came out almost in perfect condition. Some days, Astor
wondered if the only threat to his Master was another Castielo; if that was for that reason that all
these rats wanted his bloodline so badly.

But the child… if he were honest with himself, he already mourned. All this death and destruction,
and they had failed. What was the use of being one of the strongest knighthoods in the empire if they
failed their Lord when he needed them most? What was the point of those sacrifices, if the wizards or
the other noble bastards managed to win in the end?

He was so absorbed in his thoughts that he almost missed the change in atmosphere. His battle
instincts were too well ingrained in him, though. He immediately looked up, scanning the area to
determine what had changed.

He dropped his pen.

There, steps from the forest, smoke and flame parting before him, was the Duke.

And in his arms were two precious blonde bundles.

Twin, mixed, Castielo girls.

An impossibility.

A miracle.
Astor pushed through his shock; now was not the time to lose his professionalism. He quickly scanned the party emerging from the woods, trying to understand as much as possible even before His Grace opened his mouth.

The Duke was there, of course, looking physically no worse for the wear. He looked unscathed, as Astor had anticipated. His aura and emotions were once again locked down tight; Astor had no idea what mix of relief and grief he might be feeling. At his side is Astor’s youngest, but most promising, squire. Emel looked exhausted, and there was a nasty bump on his head that would need to be looked at, but the young boy was alive and well. He was swaying, almost, at the Duke’s side, and he was clearly proud but also awed by the lord and little ladies before him.

And finally, the most important thing. Things. The two young girls in His Grace’s arms. Both were clearly breathing, thank the gods, but otherwise, the picture they made was grim. One was completely slumped over, seemingly sleeping in the crook of her father’s arm. Blood trickled down her face, and her hands, wrapped in a bloody, torn, cloth, laid limply at her sides. The other appeared to be slightly better off. She was actively holding on to her father, and although she was quite gaunt, she didn’t have any obvious wounds on her. Hair held back by a dirty brown bandana, she was alert enough to be shyly taking in her surroundings. The crowd of people who had suddenly moved to get out of the duke’s way stopped to stare at the sight before them.

Through dingy gold bangs, Astor caught a glimpse of shining pink eyes.

If there had been any doubts left in him, they were gone now.

These were his master’s children. The impossible, mixed, twin, Castielo girls.

The whole area stopped to kneel as he passed them, and into the informal encampment that had become the search party’s de facto home base. His Grace came to a stop in front of Astor and issued a series of commands.

“Have the doctor see to this young man immediately. He was injured defending my daughters. I’m taking them to the city manor until they get a clean bill of health. Follow us as quickly as possible. Allow the knights to begin taking rest in shifts, but I want security around the manor doubled for the foreseeable future.”

Without waiting for a response he swung himself up onto his horse, barely impeded by the two tiny, precious children in his arms, and rode off.
“You lot!” Commander Winds pointed to a group of a half dozen knights who had already mounted their horses in anticipation. “Follow him immediately. Set up a tight perimeter around their rooms until the rest of us can return and properly secure the mansion as ordered.”

The knights rode off, and Astor couldn’t help but feel a spark of pride… and hope.

Emel watched from the commander’s side as the Duke rode off with the Little Princesses. Even though he had failed in his duty as squire of the Castielo House, his Lord had granted him mercy. He had saved Emel instead of leaving him in the fire for his failure. Another debt he owed to House Castielo.

Even this far away, Emel saw those large, pink eyes turn and watch him as she rode away with her father. Emel didn’t dare to look her right in the eye. He didn’t deserve that.

He bowed his head in shame. ‘They’re so small and fragile...the Little Princesses…’ he thought, examining the scrapes on his hands. Such little injuries for a strong young boy like him. Compared to Duke’s daughters... He could still feel how light the one he had carried felt in his arms. ‘Like carrying an injured bird…’

Clenching his fists, Emel felt determination burn inside him, he swore that one day he’d be a knight and guard the Castielo House with his life. If fate was generous, and he was ever able to protect the Little Princesses again...

‘I swear, I will never fail them like that ever again. So mote it be.’

A firm yet gentle hand on his shoulder shook him from his thoughts and reminded Emel that his commander was by his side.

“Sir?”

“Well done in protecting the daughters of the Castielo House. You have done me proud, boy.”

Emel looked down again. Another set of eyes he couldn’t bear to meet. “...No sir, I failed the daughters of the Duke. I was unable to get her back to the camp and was knocked out by the enemy,” Emel confessed.
“Son, you’re going to have to learn one day that personal failure does not mean you did not manage to complete your mission. It just means you failed to meet your personal expectations.” Commander Winds smiled gently at him, before tussling his hair into a mess.

“Yes, sir.” Emel pouted as he was steered into the Commander’s tent. The doctor was quick as he checked that Emel did not have a concussion and that his commander was aware of what medication and reduced activity Emel would need for the next month, just to be safe. It was only after the doctor had left that Commander Winds started to ask for Emel’s report on what happened.

Emel had finally reached the point where he had followed the little princess’s instructions and ended up in the abandoned hut.

“We hid, and our pursuers were killed by falling rubble. Some sort of trap that had already been set up.” Commander Winds frowned contemplatively and now that Emel thought about it, those traps were odd. Had the little princess discovered them earlier? Had she set them up?

Emel shook his head. It didn’t matter. He knew he was just stalling. He really didn’t want to explain the next part, didn’t want the Commander to know his failures… but he was a Squire in the Wolf Knighthood. He was too honourable to try and hide his mistakes.

“I thought that was all of them. But when I went to take the Little Prin- Her Grace to safety, I was hit from behind. The last thing I saw before I blacked out was the man grabbing her… Then when I woke up, the Duke was there, and there were two Prin- Ladies, and everything was on fire.” Emel tried to think if there was anything else that was important to add, so he finished lamely, “I just followed His Grace’s lead after that.”

Commander Winds sneered — but not at Emel. “That bastard … well, she gave him a good fight, if those bloodied hands were anything to go by. Duke Casteilo will be proud.”

‘Oh, right,’ Emel thought with a wince, realizing what he hadn’t said.

“Actually… her hands were already stained and bandaged when I first saw her. She was injured before any of the mercenaries caught her.”

The Commander stared at him, fury in his eyes, as they both thought about what that meant.
Annie hadn’t slept a since they had received the news.

It felt like no one in the whole manor had. A daughter. Their Lord had a daughter, a *mixed* little girl, and she was out on the streets and being targeted by all sorts of unsavoury characters. How dreadful.

Of course, there was nothing she could do to assist in the search for the young Miss, but she was far too worried to really rest. In the end, she had spent the time organizing a room for the little princess, for when she arrived. Ordering new furniture to be bought and suitably decorated plus sewing tiny nightdresses wasn’t much, but she hoped it would help ease the child after her ordeal, the poor dear.

It never occurred to her that the Duke would fail to bring his daughter home if she was the genuine thing. He couldn’t. It just wasn’t possible for her Lord to fail. He *wouldn’t* return with empty handed, there would be a child with him, mark her words.

However, she hadn’t thought he would bring *two* children home either. Such a thing was even *more* impossible than her master failing. No Castielo had ever managed to carry twins to term before.

But there he was, Duke Castielo, with two tiny, precious, living bundles in his arms. One fast asleep, roughened with soot, blood, and stained, dirty bandages. The other was partially awake, but dreadfully pale and exhausted, watching everything with curious but tired eyes.

“Annie.”

Stepping forward, she gave a small curtsey and bowed her head respectfully.

“Yes, milord?”

“Send for the doctor immediately. This little one is still bleeding. I want that checked out. And food, too. They’re both so small...”

Annie curtsied again in acknowledgement. “Of course Duke Castielo...If I may...?” she boldly
asked, stepping out of her curtsey and straightening her gaze to his face.

“Hm? Yes?”

It probably hadn’t occurred to the duke that his children wouldn’t heal as fast as he and the young master do. The dried blood and dirt all over these two small children would certainly hinder the staff doctor from doing their job. They have to get clean.

“I can have a servant sent with a bucket of hot water and a warm towel, to wipe away the dirt and grime that might infect their wounds. And let me take this one for a bath immediately. They’re so young if their wounds get infected… After all, they are *mixed* children of the Castielo House.”

The Duke looked chagrined. “...Of course. See it done. And bring her to my quarters, after. They will be staying with me tonight.”

Annie’s heart went out to the Duke. The poor man had stressed and searched non-stop since he had found out about his daughters, it made sense that he wouldn’t want to be separated from them.

She gently took the less injured child from his arms. The Duke and the child both looked unhappy about this, but it was necessary.

“We’ll be quick, my Lord,” she promised. Still, the Duke hesitated.

Annie looked down at the tiny child in her arms, and lightly patted her hair to soothe the fright she saw in her young charge’s eyes.

“And what is your name, Sweetheart?” Annie asked with a gentle smile.

The sweet child bit her lip and glanced down. It was adorable, but also sad, to see a Castielo so unsure.

“...Sis calls me Sister.”
Annie flinched, even before the Duke’s fury flared so high it felt like the air was suffocating her.

“Ah, that’s sweet but those are titles dear, not names. Don’t worry though, young Miss, I’m certain the Duke will give you and your sister beautiful names. After all, he is your father.” She smiled, eliciting a hesitant smile in return. Precious. “Any ideas, my Lord? Surely you have an idea by now?”

The Duke flushed, and Annie suppressed a smile. As she thought. Terrifying as the man may be in power, he’s always been a softie for the family at heart.

“...My Star. And my Angel.”

“Estelle and... Celestia?” Annie asked, doing her best to remember what those words would be in the old tongue. “They’re beautiful names, My Lord. What do you think, little one?”

The girl squirmed, unhappy, but clearly unwilling to say it. “...Estelle is a beautiful name.”

“But?” she gently prompted, aware that the Duke was staring at his daughter with an intense gaze. “Do you not like your name?” she asked, trying to discover where the child’s unease was coming from.

“No, I love it! I swear! It’s gorgeous! That’s not it…” The young miss protested, waving her hands about as she tried to explain her love for her new name.

Annie held back a gasp. Before, the little princess was speaking in short and simple sentences, like most other children her age do. However, now she was speaking more complex sentences, showing she was far more advanced than other toddlers.

‘The Castielo blood is strong in these children.’ Annie thought. Shaking her head slightly, she leaned forward and gave the little miss a fond smile.

“Then is it your sister’s name that’s the problem? You don’t like the name, Celestia?” Annie asked gently, trying to coax the child to be honest.

The Duke leaned over and gave the child a kiss on her head. “Be honest, my Love. What do you really think?”
“...Sis would hate it. She’s not a Celestia. If I’m a star… she’s more than an angel. She’s so strong, and she’s always been there for me. She’s everything. Couldn’t she have a name like that?”

The Duke only needed a moment to think. He said, “Naeva? It comes from the old language, like Estelle, and means Night.”

This time, the child — Lady Estelle — smiled, delighted. “That’s perfect! She’ll love it.”

The Duke smiled at her and kissed her forehead again. “My night and stars. I will see you again soon, Estelle.”

Chapter End Notes

Trickster did art for this fic! It should be connected automatically. Also, Stevie and Mdmichener wrote little recursive snippets for this on the forums. Go give them love! These things hugely motivated us to keep writing and get this chapter out already.

https://www.fanfiction.net/topic/180237/140553015/387/#176557623

https://www.fanfiction.net/topic/180237/140553015/387/#176571998
Chapter 6

Chapter by AislingRoisin (JayBird345)

Chapter Notes

For there is no friend like a sister in calm or stormy weather; to cheer one on the tedious way, to fetch one if one goes astray, to lift one if one totters down, to strengthen whilst one stands.

- Christina Rossetti

Note: This is a crossover between Silver Queens' Dreaming of Sunshine Universe and I am a Child of this House/I Belong to House Castiello Manhwa.

You should be able to follow this without much help, but in case you haven't read one or the other of these niche fandoms:

Summary of Dreaming of Sunshine: The main character, Shikako, is reborn from our world into the world of Naruto. She is Shikamaru's twin sister, of the Nara clan, so she can manipulate shadows. She also has a connection to the god-entity Gelel, which she communes with from a stone she wears as a necklace, and whom she can find by following music she can hear.

Summary of I am a Child of this House: Estelle is a reborn woman from Korea who was horribly confined and abused by her mother. When her father- the terrifying Duke Castielo - learns of her existence, she is quickly brought into his household and educated as a Lady, while also slowly unravelling the secrets of her Family's line, of magic, and of the country itself.

Chapter 6

The horse ride was long, and a little scary at times, but she knew that she and her sister were finally safe. Her sister would have never fallen asleep if she had any doubts about this man, plus there was a faint voice coming from the man’s sword. Much like in the market, it was speaking to her, telling her that she and her sister are precious to the man and that even though they have just met, he will die before allowing them to suffer and be unhappy.

Snuggling into his hold, she stared in wonder as they raced through the streets of the city. People rushed to stay out of their way and even seemed to cower in fear, but since the man was urging his horse to go as fast as possible, she didn’t see too much of it.

Finally, they arrived at a beautiful looking mansion, elegantly and tastefully decorated. A matronly woman was waiting by the door. She welcomed the man home before freezing in shock at the sight of her and her sister.
The woman was introduced as Annie and worked for the man, Duke Castielo.

‘Why did a Duke take interest in me and my sister?’ she puzzled, sneaking glances at the man carrying her.

Things got a bit awkward when Annie took her from the man’s arms and asked for her name.

She bit her lip and glanced down, unsure how to explain that the woman had never really given them names. For a long time, she had thought ‘pink eyes’ was her name until her sister had figured out that it was just a description.

Not wanting to reveal that little embarrassing story, she quietly mumbled, “...Sis calls me Sister.”

Annie flinched, and the Duke’s energy went...scary. She could feel pressure moving like waves from him and flowing into the people around them. Frightened by these feelings, she gripped his arm tighter, causing him to lower the pressure until it was something more bearable.

“Ah, that’s sweet but those are titles dear, not names,” Annie said to her kindly. “Don’t worry though, young Miss, I’m certain the Duke will give you and your sister beautiful names. After all, he is your father.” Annie smiled.

She felt her brain freeze in shock at those words, faintly feeling herself smile awkwardly back in return.

“So, this intimidating man with the warm hugs and gentle voice... was her father...?!?!” she mentally screamed, as she peeked at him from under her lashes. Looking at his face, she supposed that there was a certain resemblance to her sister’s when she was in a bad mood.

She was so swept up by this revelation that she missed the Annie asking the Duke for a name for herself and her sister. It was only due to him tightening his hold on her that she heard his reply.

“...My Star. And my Angel.”

Annie confirmed with the Duke, repeating words that must be their names.

“Estelle,” Annie said, looking at her.

Blushing furiously at his words, she silently mouthed the name ‘Estelle’ over and over as Annie and her father continued to converse.

‘I have a name! My father named me and says I’m his Star!’ A seed of happiness bloomed inside her at the thought. She was so pleased to finally have a loving parent again.

Estelle was jolted out of her happiness, at hearing her father give the name ‘Celestia’ to her sister.

‘No...that’s not right. Sister is more than an Angel...’ Squirming in discomfort, Estelle realized Annie asked her if she liked her new name. Feeling her father’s eyes on her, Estelle mumbled her answer softly, “...Estelle is a beautiful name.”

She wished they would stop probing; her father’s gaze was making her feel slightly uncomfortable, to tell the truth, and Annie didn’t seem to catch a hint. Feeling her father’s gaze turn a little sad, Estelle started to babble frantically, not wanting them to misunderstand her feelings.

“No, I love it! I swear! It’s gorgeous! That’s not it...” She trailed off, coughing awkwardly in embarrassment as her father gazed softly at her. She desperately didn’t want to upset him. He was a
Duke! Surely he would be upset if she rejected her sister’s name. He was too important to want backtalk from a toddler he just met, daughter or no.

If he got angry, how would he punish them? Would he turn them back out, for being troublesome?

Trying to remember the little tricks her real mother had taught her when public speaking, Estelle squared her shoulders and tried to imagine their heads as potatoes.

The Duke leaned over and gave her a soft, almost fleeting kiss on her head. “Be honest, my Love. What do you really think?”

Drawing courage from that act and picturing the curious staff around peering at them as potato people, Estelle blurted out, “Sis would hate it. She’s not a Celestia. If I’m a star… she’s more than an angel. She’s so strong, and she’s always been there for me. She’s everything. Couldn’t she have a name like that?”

He didn’t seem angry, thank god, and Estelle dared to hope she hadn’t ruined things already, as she waited for his reply.

The Duke only needed a moment to think before he made up his mind.

“Naeva? It comes from the old language, like Estelle, and means Night,” he proposed.

Beaming up at the man, Estelle whispered the name to herself, before crying out loud, “That’s perfect! She’ll love it!”

The Duke smiled at her, and an overwhelming sense of being loved engulfed her. He brushed his face against her forehead again. “My night and stars. I will see you again soon, Estelle.”

She watched the Duke — Her father!!! She has a father again!! — turn and leave, taking her sleeping sister further and further away from her.

The happiness she had felt when he had given her a name — She has a name! He loves her enough to name her! — started to fade, leaving her cold and slightly upset.

“Well, Lady Estelle, let us go and get you nice and clean hmm?” Estelle decided that Annie seemed like a kind person. Her voice was soft as she gazed fondly at her, and she didn’t stop watching Estelle until she nodded in assent.

Looking back to where her sister had disappeared with her father, Estelle sighed softly as she was carried away.

‘I wish father hadn’t separated us. Sister had finally returned to me. We were together again.’

Leaning against the housekeeper’s shoulder, Estelle prayed that time would go faster so she would find herself next to her sister again.

Before she knew it they had arrived in a large room, made of porcelain and marble. The ceiling and floor sparkled in the candlelight, in Estelle’s eyes the whole place just screamed ‘super rich!’

‘Wait, if this is the bathroom, then that means-’ Freezing in realization, Estelle stared in horror at the giant bathtub filled with water and bubbles.

‘No…’ Dread filled her body, as she gently began to tremble in fear.
“Now little princess, don’t be scared. The water is nice and warm, and we’ll be in the shallow area of the tub.”

Her body was gently lowered to the edge of the tub and before Estelle could blink, her clothes were gone and she was placed in the water.

The world narrowed until all Estelle could feel was the water that came up to her neck, and only seemed to be rising.

Estelle couldn’t move, couldn’t breathe; there was a strong pressure pushing against her chest, causing her to crouch over to try and breathe better. The room seemed to spin as her heartbeat grew louder and louder, drowning out Annie’s panicked voice.

‘I’m scared! I want my sister! I don’t want to be here! Sister! SISTER!’ Clutching her chest, with one hand, in pain she began to flail about in a blind panic, the water splashing about around her. Her head went underwater a few times in her attempts to avoid Annie’s hands, making her desperation even more heightened. Memories began to flash before her eyes, as she accidentally choked on the soapy water getting into her mouth.

The water was steadily rising, scaring Estelle as no matter how hard she pushed and clawed at the lid, the chest top refused to break. She could hear her sister shouting encouragements at her to keep trying, that they couldn’t give up just yet. Still, the water continued to get higher and higher, forcing Estelle and Naeva to stand on their tippy toes to avoid breathing in water.

Suddenly Estelle felt herself trip and slip under the water, her golden hair flaring about her head and getting tangled with her flailing hands and neck. Managing to get a good grip on the walls and steady her feet, Estelle managed to push herself above the water again, choking and spitting water out of her mouth as she sobbed and cried for her sister to save her.

The wind rattled the chest as the lightning illuminated the inside of the box. Her sister’s eyes had burned like rubies, her hair sparkled like spun gold with water droplets shining like diamonds weaved in. She had looked like one of those angels in the museums back in Korea; those western angels with swords, who slew demons and attacked the wicked. My angel sister.

Her sister always made her feel safe, even in the darkest of times when they were hiding in that shack and those men were trying to kidnap them. Naeva is the only one who can help her, the only person who can save her! She couldn’t think of anything except how she needed her sister and threw her whole being into that wish.

“Sister! Sister please save me!!”

Her lungs burned with lack of air. Estelle managed to scratch and claw at Annie whenever she got to close. Her sobs were loud and wheezing as the dizziness grew stronger. Black spots began to appear in front of her eyes, as the room spun and spun.

Giving out one last scream for her sister, Estelle felt herself slip back into dark and cold memories.

It was warm.

That was the first thing Shikako noticed. The warmth, like banked embers in a hearth fire. It was soothing. Welcoming. Safe.

The next thing she noticed was her sister’s presence, and mood. Her sister was here, and calm,
wrapped in the same protective shadow as Shikako. That’s good.

She decided to trust the warmth-that-wanted-them-safe, and she let herself succumb to her exhaustion.

She was vaguely aware of being held, of strong arms holding her on a horse, of conversations happening around her, but none of that seemed important. She was just so tired. It’d been three years since she felt safe enough to truly rest, but here, with her sister and these cozy shadows, she finally felt she could.

This comfortable napping provided her with a release from her pain. She had managed to ignore and push through it, to keep fighting when her sister was in danger, but now… her weak body seemed to amplify the pain. She was a jounin, damnit. These little wounds shouldn’t hurt so much… but they did.

So, she let herself doze, and took the time to find herself. It was hard to find motivation when just letting herself rest like this was so nice… but Shikako knows she should be motivated like she was when her sister was in danger. She needed to push the weariness down, and grasp on to her life. There was still so much to live for, she knew, and she slowly forced her soul to understand that too.

With great effort, Shikako opened her eyes.

The same man from before, the one who saved her and her sister, was still holding her. Her sister was no longer by her side, but stretching out her senses, Shikako could feel her sister’s bright little star pulsing calmly not too far away. Well, that’s okay then.

The arms holding her shifted; evidently, her awakening had been noticed.

“You can keep resting, Little One,” a deep, soothing voice said. With the words, another wave of the protection-safe-warm feeling overpowered her, along with the lowest tinkling of a familiar melody. The warmth reminded her of Sasuke, or of her father, Nara Shikaku. That music…

She snapped awake, realizing she recognized that melody.

*Gelel.*

It was faint, barely noticeable at first. The melody was also a little off key like it was being sung in a different tone of voice, but the main melody was still the same. She was transported back to her old life, and the stone-god she had merged with there.

No wonder she had subconsciously trusted this person enough to sleep in their arms, even as her sister left her side. Gelel clearly deemed this man to be one of theirs.

It sang of protection, a fierce spirit with an honest soul and of a bloodthirst to see any enemy destroyed, never being able to touch his family.

‘This man would have made an excellent ninja.’

The song responded to her thought, a gentle humming that seemed to indicate agreement. For the first time in a long while, Shikako felt content.

The man carried her to a new room, and gently set her down on a comfortable couch where she could stretch out her leg and elevate her ankle.
“The doctor is on his way. In the meantime, I’m going to remove those dirty bandages and clean your wounds so they don’t get… infected. Is that okay? Tell me if anything hurts…”

Shikako nodded, not finding the need to reply with words. What else was there to say?

The kind man was very careful as he cut the bandages. Shikako winced at the dirt and gore that she could now see had been rubbed into her wounds. Disinfecting that was not going to be pleasant. But when the man began wiping at her wounds with a cloth and warm water, he was incredibly gentle. It took a very long time considering how small the wounds were, but the process barely hurt, he was so precise and efficient in his ministrations.

He rebandaged them with fresh, clean bandages, and then pulled her into his lap, careful not to jostle her ankle. Shikako once more, relaxed into his embrace. She felt… good.

Warm shadows enveloped her with a sense of safety. Gelel’s song calmed her with its gentle melody. And, not too far away, her sister’s star-like presence shined brighter than she had ever noticed it before. It seemed…a little nervous but still content.

And then, her sister’s star went supernova.

Shikako was fully alert and on the run before she even consciously registered it.

Ein hadn’t been prepared for his sleepy little girl to suddenly jump from his arms; an oversight he would not make again. Terrified at the sight of her landing roughly, especially after being told by Annie that his daughter’s tiny, broken body was more fragile than his son’s…Ein reached out to try and catch her before she hurt herself.

Slipping from his fingers she landed, and rolled, building up momentum to keep running, her wounds opened up but his daughter didn’t seem to notice the pain. A quick glance allowed Ein to see a black aura wrapped around his daughter’s tiny, swollen ankle, supporting and protecting it. Even as he chased after her in terror, he couldn’t help but be impressed. So young, and to have so much control! Even using it to buff her abilities — she managed to stay ahead of him despite his many advantages!

He shoved that thought aside. Pride at his incredible little girl later. Catch her now. Narrowing his eyes in concern, he felt the air ripple in despair, something was wrong.

Not even finishing his thought, a bloodcurdling scream pierced the air. The sense of panic and pain was amplified by a pure, clear aura, more a feeling that something that could be seen. The emotions reached violently across the manor to her family.

The audible cue only made Naeva run faster, as difficult as that was to imagine, so Ein poured on the speed as well. His daughter seemed to bounce from wall to wall, a clever way to keep her speed up when turning corners and escaping his grasp yet again.

Bursting through the doors of the washroom, Ein paused for a moment to take it all in.

It was a scene of panic.

Annie was bent over the bathtub, trying to grab at the child writhing in the water. Vicious tendrils of black aura lashed out whenever she got near, making it difficult for her to grab his Star and pull her out. The knights guarding the room had arrived before him and his Night, but not by much. They stood dumbly at the scene, still in too much of a shock to leap into action.
In the half second it took Ein to take all this in, Naeva had continued bolting ahead, straight for the tub. She was undeterred by either the physical or spiritual backlash that was hindering Annie. She dove right through and hauled her sister into her arms, making sure she held Estelle’s head about the shallow water in the tub.

Ein was only a few steps behind her and reached down to haul them both out of the tub entirely. His daughters didn’t seem to notice; they were lost in each other’s embrace.

“It’s okay, Sister, it’s okay, I’m here. Just breathe. Breathe. You’re safe. We’re not in there. We can breathe. You can breathe…”

Part of Ein was filing this information away for later, but most of him snapped into action. He set the girls down far from the tub and backed up to give them the space Estelle so clearly needed as she coughed and wheezed, slowly finding air again. Around him, his staff jumped into action, as they should. The Knights' drug the tub away, where the girls couldn’t see it, and Annie brought fluffy dry towels and clothing and set them off to the side where the girls could grab them if they wanted. She then smartly retreated.

Ein paid all of this the barest of attention. Instead, he focused on his little girls. Naeva had slipped into a language Ein was unfamiliar with — Twin Speak, perhaps — but her voice was soothing and confident, and Estelle was beginning to catch her breath, so he assumed it was understandable as a consolation to his daughters.

Estelle eventually caught her breath, only to mumble a few unintelligible words to her sister. She burst into tears before her sister was able to respond.

Naeva just held Estelle closer, the two sinkings to the floor. Eventually, Naeva began humming a tune he was unfamiliar with. It was slow and sweet. Reassuring. Estelle’s tears slowed. A few bars in, between sniffles, Estelle added lyrics in their twin-language to Naeva’s tune. Having her sister hold her, and focusing on the lyrics to the song, seemed to help. Slowly, Estelle calmed down.

Eventually, the twins drifted to sleep, their song slowly dying out as exhaustion took them again. Ein took the warm fluffy towels Annie has brought and wrapped his daughters up in them together. They were so very small, one towel was enough to engulf them both, though he used more just to be sure. He carried them to bed, wrapped up in their towels, and sat at their side.

They slept peacefully, his night and stars. If it weren’t for the damp sheets, and for Naeva’s still-visible injuries, it would almost be a cute scene. But they were still wet from Estelle’s panic attack, and Naeva’s ankle was swollen to almost twice the size of its match by now, so Ein could only worry, and wait. The doctor would be here soon. His precious girls would heal, body and mind, and he would keep them from ever being hurt like this again. And then, once he was sure they were healed and safe, he would find a way to ensure those that hurt them faced his wrath. This would not be happening again. Ever.

——

A young man in a brown cloak lurked from his corner in the dirty pub, nursing his pint of beer as he watched his target seem to drown himself in alcohol. The mercenary grew rowdier and rowdier, acting up and starting a small brawl with another patron before being kicked out by the burly looking bartender.

Leaving some coins on his table, he silently slipped out and took to the roofs of the city, following the stumbling mercenary down the back alleys. Smirking as he tripped and fell into the trash, he jumped down and sauntered up behind the man. Pulling out his knife, he slit the man’s throat and
caught his body before throwing it back into the trash. He carefully checked that the blood had not spattered onto himself, before turning away from the disgusting trash pile.

Rummaging through his cloak, he pulled out a crumpled piece of parchment and crossed off another name. Sighing in disgust, he casually sauntered out of the alleyway and down to another pub.

‘What an annoying job. That stuck up noble could at least pay for the amount of drinks I have to buy today…’ Whistling absentmindedly, he strolled into the next pub and picked a spot near the door. Signalling down a cute looking barmaid, he made sure to flirt with her for a bit before asking for a pint.

It wasn’t long before his next target, possibly the most important target of the day stepped into the bar. The man had carefully been watering down his drinks since he came in, just in anticipation of this target; no simple assassination would take care of things here. It was time he finally found what his patron needed to know.

End of Chapter 6
Ein stared down at the children sleeping in his bed. A stray strand of hair had fallen over one of the girl’s faces. Little Naeva. His reckless daughter. Gently, using just his pinky, he brushed it back. Her nose twitched adorably as the strand brushed over it, but his touch was otherwise light enough not to disturb her greatly needed slumber.

Ein was glad. He knew even a single pinky would be enough to kill her, never mind wake her. They were both so very fragile. Karl was never even half this breakable, not even as an infant, and her weakness frightened him.

Both were sleeping peacefully, neither showing signs of any nightmares or further trauma. Sighing thankfully that they wouldn’t needlessly suffer in their dreams, Ein rose from his chair and left the room.

Knights guarded every window, door and possible entrance to the manor. No one would be threatening his girls tonight, not without being ambushed and destroyed by his men. Keeping a tight lid on his raging aura, Ein smirked with bloodlust at the thought of some fool trying to spirit his daughter’s away while he was around.

His office was thankfully close to his room, making it easier for Ein to keep an eye on the girls while also getting some paperwork done. Kelson had wheeled in a stack of papers earlier in the day and knowing the old butler, would be bugging him about it the moment the girls are settled.

Most of them were reports of the search in the town, then the forest, noted rumours about his daughters and who had seemed suspicious during the event, plus a list of potential spies of the wizards and nobles who desired the Castielo bloodline. Skimming through the list, Ein mused that the list he had compiled was more detailed in identifying the individuals, truly his Wolf knights needed more training if an underhanded man like him could compile a better list in half the time.

Smirking at the thought of those two meeting, Ein quickly began to go through the paperwork. The sooner he finished this, the sooner he could go back to his beloved daughters. Going through the final report Commander Winds had submitted, Ein froze at the note that his little Naeva had her hands wounded long before Squire Emel had found her. Ein recalled the horrible realization that had hit him when he had found his girls whore of a bearer. That same fury threatened to consume him as he scolded himself for making her death so short, he should have dragged it out more until she suffered as much as his daughters had suffered under her ‘care’.
Crumbling the paper in his hand, Ein pulled in his aura as tightly as possible. Estelle and Naeva had proven to be very sensitive to auras, so the last thing he wanted was to wake them up with his rage. Breathing deeply through his nose, Ein jotted down a note to Commander Winds to see to the squire’s growth as a potential personal knight for his daughters and a note for Kelson to give the squire a reward.

‘He shows great promise and will be a good addition to my daughter’s future personal knights.’ Musing to himself in satisfaction, Ein put aside the last of the paperwork.

Pulling a cord nearly hidden by the curtains, Ein watched as Kelson walked in the room with a tray full of tea and snacks.

“Kelson.”

“Yes my lord?” Kelson replied, finishing placing the teacup and snacks before him. Ein took a sip of the tea, before handing a sealed letter with the family crest to Kelson.

“Notify my son’s school that he will be returning home to the Duchy for the rest of the semester.” Ein needed his son by his side as soon as possible, with those rat bastards scurrying about and threatening his family. He could help protect and love his sisters. And he would be safer himself at Ein’s side.

“As you command, Duke Castielo.” Kelson gave a short bow before stepping out of the room. Leaning back into his chair, Ein watched the sun start to rise and change the sky from dark blue to purple and then pink.

‘It’s the same shade as my daughter’s eyes.’ Ein loved their eye colour, it seemed to suit them in a way his red eyes never would.

‘I swear that I will protect them. No one will hurt any of my children as long as I live.’ The sun rose and the sky became red-pink, a beautiful combination of his, his son’s eye colour his daughters eye colour.
Shikako bolted awake, one fist swinging even as she tried to use her momentum to get away, to look away from the Sharingan before he could-

A hand much larger than her own caught her wrist. Gently. So gently. It stopped her punch from connecting with anything, yes, but if she tried to break free, she was sure she could with no problem. It was just two fingers, and no pressure, after all. Two very large fingers, that couldn’t possibly be Sasuke’s or her sister’s…

Shikako pulled her arm free but doesn’t move to attack again. She remembered now, what was going on. The nice man with the not-Uchiha energy and the off-key Gelel Stone had picked her and her sister up. He had cleaned her wounded hands and helped her take care of her sister when she had had a panic attack. She vaguely remembered holding her sister until she could barely keep her eyes open, then the sensation of being cradled and kissed, more a dream than a memory...

She glanced at her sister and confirmed with her eyes what she felt in her soul; her sister was sleeping safely and peacefully at her side. They had been tucked into a large plush bed, and the nice red-eyed man sat by their side. He was the one she tried to punch, the one who was so gentle with her.

Her sudden movements had apparently roused her sister. She snuggled closer into Shikako’s side, quietly murmuring “Sis…” before settling back down.

“She’s awake, Shikako. Be careful, Naeva. You don’t want to hurt yourself, or wake Estelle.”

Shikako blinked at the man and cast around again to see who he was talking to. But there was no one else.

“Me?” she whispered quietly, her left hand finding her sister’s right without thinking. She didn’t even notice what she had done, confused as she was. No one else was around, though, so who else could this man be talking to?

“Ah, yes, things keep happening so quickly… I named your sister Estelle. And I wanted to give you the matching name Naeva if you liked it.”
Shikako didn’t know how to respond. She’d been Shikako for so long... She didn’t even remember her first life’s name, it was too long ago. No matter, she wasn’t that person anymore. But … she hadn’t become a person *here* yet, either. No name. No information. It was just her and her sister and their focus on surviving through the misery thrust upon them by *that* woman.

Would it be better to fit into this world? Could she afford to lose Shikako, when she didn’t even know who Naeva was yet?

She didn’t respond quickly enough, so he continued, “Estelle thought you would like it, but if you don’t we can pick something else. Anything else you want.”

She wanted to be Shikako again. She wanted to be powerful, and older, and to have dozens of friends and family to love. She wanted to stop losing everything, including herself. But…

“You’re my daughter, you can have any name you want, my little Night.”

She couldn’t doubt his words, her soul and Gelel’s song both told her they were completely sincere. A father…

She was never going to get her old lives back again. She could not keep being Shikako without the people she left behind. And she wanted a family, so very dearly…

‘This man may look intimidating but he is kind. Gelel certainly favours him.’ Shikako smiled softly as she noticed he was trying to hide his nervousness by being more intimidating.

“Naeva ...It’s pretty,” she said. His lips twitched up in a small smile, but she was pretty sure it would be considered beaming for someone like him.

‘He reminds me a bit of you...Sasuke.’ A bittersweet feeling filled her heart, threatening to rip it apart completely. Taking a deep, comforting breath Shikako convinced herself that she was ready.

He leaned over to give her a tight hug, not jostling her so she could keep holding Estelle’s hand without waking her. Enveloped in his arms, a soft kiss lightly pressed into her hair, Shi- Naeva let herself hope. It was hard not to. Not when she felt so loved.
‘Ah, this feels familiar…’ She thought, leaning in slightly into his embrace. She suddenly remembered something her last father, Shikaku Nara, had told her and Shika-her brother before his death.

“We do what we have to do until the end, it’s our last job.”

‘I did all I had to do as Shikako, but that mission is done. No matter how I feel I can never be Shikako again.’ Pressing her face deeper into his shoulder, she gave a soft sigh.

‘I can’t think about that time anymore. I have to focus on the now. I have a twin sister who needs me to be strong, as this is her first time as a reincarnation. If I look back I am lost, so I have to keep moving forward.’

Shikako took a deep breath, and pulled back from the hug, just a little, so she could see his face.

“Thank you… Dad,” Naeva said, and she meant it.

“My Lord Husband.”

The Emperor still found it odd, after all these years, how his Empress would maintain the formality between them that was due to him as her husband and Emperor. But she had always been the most proper of Ladies, so he can’t fault her for maintaining her pleasantries in the Throne Room. It was a sign of respect, he knew.

And, who was he to demand closeness from her? He’s the one that neglected her, so busy running the kingdom that he hardly saw her anymore except at meals and formal events. She’s so patient with him; he doesn’t dare to push that generosity by pushing her to drop her manners for him.

“My Lady Wife,” he returned, matching her pleasantries, though he couldn’t help but add, “Thank you so much for coming Darling.” He smiled and gestured for her to sit on the throne next to his, to put them on more even footing. “This news was too important to wait until supper, but I couldn’t just
walk out of Court without a reason.”

Without even signalling for it, a servant set up a tea tray at her side; it would be her favourite Lemongrass blend. He always had them keep her favourites ready. The few moments they had together were precious and should be enjoyed, after all.

“You are the Emperor, My Lord,” she said simply. It was clear she means her words to tell him something, but he wasn’t entirely sure what. His patient, brilliant Empress was often a step ahead of him. He was lucky to have her. Mother of his precious children. Godmother to his beloved Ein’s children… oh, yes, that was why she is here, still waiting for him to speak again.

Forgetting her previous words entirely, he tore his eyes away from his wife to watch the next petitioner being brought in. It was important to at least look attentive to his subject’s arrival, even if he was not. It was important that his citizens felt their emperor cared for them personally.

“Ein found that he was missing a child! A mixed daughter! And not just one, but two! Twin Casteilos! That’s never happened before. He must be delighted. We’ll have to send our congratulations!”

A sharp clatter sounded from his side. He looked over at the crash and found the small stand and tea set at his wife’s side to have been knocked over, her cup of tea dropped and spilling onto her gown. She must have been picking up her tea, right as he told her, and dropped it in surprise.

“Oh dear!”

The servants fluttered around, cleaning up the tea and broken porcelain. Before he could help, one took his wife’s hand and helped her out of the throne and away from the mess. He watched helplessly as she let the servant lead her away while others followed and fussied over the tea that had gotten on the hem of her gown.

He wasn’t able to follow, though. Despite the commotion, there were still petitioners waiting on him. Instead of following his wife, he had to neglect her, again. Well, they could finish speaking, and he could apologize at dinner tonight.

In the meantime, though, he motioned for the servants to send more tea to the Empress’ room. A paltry apology, for delivering this joyous news so badly, but it would have to be enough, for now.
The Emperor returned focus to his subject and decided not to let this incident ruin his feelings about this joyous news.

Twins!

A small red-haired boy fell to the ground in pain as the wizard yelled angrily above him.

“We were so close! That child was practically in our grasp and those idiots ruined everything in the last few minutes!” Flicking his hands in agitation, the boy screamed as magic coursed through his body painfully.

Wide green eyes rolled up into the back of his head, as the boy fell into unconsciousness. Tsing in disgust at the weakness before him, the wizard grabbed the slave and dragged him to another dark room.

“Our Lord is not pleased...those fools have no idea who they have managed to cross,” he muttered, chucking the red-haired boy into the darkness. Yellow glowing eyes stared hungrily from the shadows, before revealing sharp white teeth.

“Oh servants of my Lord forgive me for my failure. To appease your anger I offer this thing for your amusement.” He cried, casting a spell to wake the servant.

He waited for a moment and grinned when the shadows seemed to reply.

“So long as they live we will never stop hunting them. I swear this too. Please, bless us the strength of your Glory to continue our work in your name.”

The lights dimmed and the darkness grew darker. The eyes and teeth descended onto the boy as the wizard closed the entrance, ignoring the screams and pleads of mercy coming from behind the iron door. He turned to his waiting brethren.
“Notify the others that I am calling for a council. We have much to discuss.”

His fellow wizard nodded and turned to spread the word. Gesturing for another slave to come forward, he absently made note that this one was more attractive than the other.

“Go to Lord Martin tonight and notify him that if he ever wants to see his brat get a baby in that little thing, he's going to have to do more than just stand by idly while we do all the work.”

“Yes, master.” Just as the red-haired girl was reaching the door, the wizard called back to her.

“Also make sure to be in my personal quarters tonight.” He watched her try and hide a tremble of fear as she bowed once more and left the room. Grinning in anticipation, the wizard began to make plans of what kind of experiments he wanted to try on her after he'd had his stress relieved.

‘Maybe I should see if crossbreeding with the new chimeras is possible. Haven't tried that in a while.’

Looking out at the rising sun, the wizard knew that at least for himself, he'd have a good day.

Karl wondered why he was being pulled from school.

It was a relief, truly. He wasn’t constantly sick these days from being around so many humans, but it was still difficult and unpleasant. The first few weeks he had entered the academy he had needed his father to come to take him home at nights because he was so sick. But those days were behind him now. He’s a Castielo. A strong one. He could bear the social interaction for the sake of his education, and his house. He came to school, and he endured. Because of his diligence, he’d noticed his tolerance for humans improving every day. This could only help him when he became Duke.

Karl was the only Casteilo in the world, aside from his father, after all. And one day Karl may be the only Casteilo at all. If he can’t learn to be near humans, he won't be able to take over the duties expected of him as future Duke. He didn't want to disappoint his father or let the legacy of his House die with himself. No, what Karl wanted was to prove all those naysayers wrong and maybe someday, in the far future, find someone like his late mother for himself. It was critical that Karl
learned to interact with them safely.

Which is exactly why his father would never pull him from school now if it wasn’t an emergency.

The Academy was well isolated behind its many layers of security, but the capital wasn’t entirely cut off from campus. Enough of the city’s bustle could be heard from a distance, enough people came in and out to exchange rumours… which is why the student body had heard some strange things in the last few days.

What Karl knew for certain was this: there had been a manhunt. A vicious one. The Knights of the Black Wolf had been hunting in full force with his father leading them. Wizards, nobles and mercenaries alike had also participated. The eastern forest had burned to cinders.

Karl was not one who worried, especially over his father. His father was the Duke Castielo. He was invincible. There was nothing to worry about, except perhaps his father’s odd tendency to feel emotional pain from loss. But there was a small seed of concern in his mind. Something was very wrong, and the grim looks on the faces of the Knights who came to escort him back to the manor only confirmed it.

He sat back in the carriage, wondering what could possibly threaten the great House Castielo, ignoring the odd heaviness that had taken root in his chest.

Chapter End Notes

Just wanted to note that we decided to age Karl up a bit. He’s ~8 here, instead of the 5 he would be if we kept the canon ration of ages. This is both because we think it's a good age gap (same as Sasuke-Itachi, for example), and because we refuse to write a story with THREE main characters under the age of 6.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

WARNING: The last two sections of this chapter contain implications of sexual violence, lack of consent in regards to off-screen characters, and misogyny of varying levels of description. Viewer discretion is advised!

Estelle hummed cheerfully to herself as she stood as still as possible on the little stool. Her sister stood next to her on her own little stool, throwing concerned glances to the windows and doors. Giving Naeva a big smile as their eyes met, Estelle giggled, barely containing her excitement, she couldn’t wait to see how her new dress would look once the final adjustments were made.

Annie had brought up to their father, during breakfast, that they would need new clothes as there was nothing suitable for them in the house; not even an hour later, wagons and wagons full of beautiful fabrics and patterns had arrived and been delivered. Annie and a few other servants had been working non-stop to make them dresses, and thus the twins had been standing still on those stools for most of the morning.

Having a weaker body due to the strain they had put themselves through these last few days, Estelle and Naeva had needed multiple breaks to sit down. Finally the last adjustments were being made and Estelle would have a chance to see her dress. Panting lightly in exhaustion, she smiled as Annie ordered a servant to go fetch some milk and snacks for her and her sister.

“Just be patient a little bit longer, my Lady, it’s almost done now. In the meantime let’s fix your hair shall we?” A soft brush smoothed out all the tangles before parting her hair in half. Her bangs were brushed to the side and the top part of her hair was styled into an updo, with the rest of her hair being brushed over her shoulders. Estelle could feel Annie weave a ribbon into her hair and use small pins to keep everything in place.

‘Wow, she’s so quick with her hands.’ Estelle thought as she watched Annie move on towards Naeva and start brushing her sister’s hair. Naeva’s tense shoulders relaxed a bit, as Annie gently pulled and twisted her hair into a braided chignon.

“There, now my ladies are ready. What do you think?” Annie gestured to a servant to bring forth a giant mirror, revealing the girls' new dresses and hairstyles.

Estelle’s dress was a pretty pink with embroidered stars in a slightly darker colour. Her collar was in a peter pan style, her sleeves were loose at the shoulders, and tightened at the wrist. A full piece, white looking apron hung over the dress with ruffled short sleeves. Her hair was held back by a pink bow, the exact same shade as her dress. All exhaustion seemed to momentarily disappear as Estelle stared, spellbound, at herself in the mirror.

‘I looked like one of those western dolls!’ she inwardly squealed, never realizing how cute her features looked in these vintage western style dresses. Turning to her sister, Estelle ’s smile grew as she saw how adorable her sister looked, as well.

Naeva had a slightly different style of dress, in beautiful forest green with little crescent moons and stars embroidered in a darker shade. She had a lace white jabot collar, and her sleeves were loose
with ruffled lace at the wrist. Her bandaged hands were covered by soft, brown, leather gloves. The bottom of her dress was very simple in contrast, with a hem of white lace. Her hair was pulled back in a braided chignon and held back by white pearls on pins.

“Sister looks so cute!” Estelle gushed, beaming wildly at Naeva. Her sister looked baffled at her reflection, gently patting her hair and dress, feeling the texture of the fabric under her gloves. Estelle giggled as her sister gave a few high kicks, uncaring of Annie scolding her about revealing her bloomers underneath. Finally satisfied with her range of movement, Naeva walked closer to Estelle and gave her a hug.

“You look adorable Estelle. Like a sweet looking doll.” Estelle smiled as her sister pressed her gloved hand against her cheek and planted a kiss on her forehead. Giggling lightly at the sensation, Estelle complemented her sister in return.

“You look amazing too, Naeva. So prim and proper! Like a Lady in one of those steampunk western dramas!”

Estelle watched with stars in her eyes as Naeva looked befuddled. Then she burst into cute giggles. Joining in, Estelle wondered if she had ever felt so happy; they were finally safe, warm and with a loving, if a little bit intimidating, parent, they were eating three meals a day, had tasted sweets again and now had received brand new clothing instead of the cast off rags they had worn before.

Annie rewarded their patience with the tailoring by bringing in a stack of deserts practically larger than Estelle herself. The display was edged by a ring of the cookies Estelle had so far most enjoyed of all her treats here. Estelle eagerly took one of the cookies, scrunching up her face in delight when she took a bite. “Thank you!” Through slitted eyes, she saw Annie beam. A small thread of tension in her relaxed a little, just for a moment.

Everything felt and seemed so perfect, that a part of Estelle was terrified to lose it or find out it was all a lie. She felt so eager to accept all of this care and affection because anything otherwise might see herself and her sister removed from such a lovely home. Oh, she knew the stones in her father’s sword spoke of protection, love and care to her, but a part of her wondered if everything was just a little too good to be true. That maybe those voices didn’t always tell the truth. Estelle didn’t want to wake up one day and find herself and Naeva locked up in that chest, nameless, barely surviving and starving.

‘Father cares for me and Sis,’ Estelle thought, smiling as her sister thanked the male servant who has just arrived with milk to go with the snacks. Rebuffing Annie’s aid, Naeva insisted on serving the milk herself, no help needed. Estelle held back a wince, as she watched her sister remove one of her gloves, the bandages a bit red, and carefully poured two cups of milk. Narrowing her eyes slightly, Estelle began to make her way to the coffee table, keeping her cheerful smile on her face. ‘He wouldn’t send us back to that woman if he gets bored with us.’

Thanking her sister, Estelle took the cup and sat next to her on the loveseat, holding one of those bandaged hands in her own. Making sure to keep her grip nice and light, Estelle gently caressed her sister’s bandaged and healing hand.

‘He wouldn’t.’

Emel tried not to swallow nervously, as he stood in front of Duke Castielo. He had been summoned from his afternoon training and had quickly found himself before his lord, waiting to be acknowledged as the Duke finished his paperwork.
“...Squire Emel.” Resisting the urge to flinch, Emel saluted in respect as the Duke’s intimidating crimson eyes stared at him over the desk.

“Sir!”

A brief pause filled the space, as the Duke went back to the paper before him, carefully signing off something on the sheet before sealing it shut with wax and his signet ring.

“Give this to the trainer Commander Winds assigned for you. You will be joining the entourage of knights that will be escorting my son to the duchy manor. From now on, you will be stationed there until you receive the rank of ‘knight’.”

Emel stared dumbfounded at the letter his lord had given him, trying to understand why he had been rewarded with guarding the heir to the House of Castielo when he had absolutely failed the little ladies when they needed him most.

“But sire, I am just a squire. What could I do to help protect the Heir of the House?”

“Do not fish for compliments. I find such things tedious and time wasting. You impressed Commander Winds and you impressed me.”

Emel froze as crimson eyes turned even darker, as the Duke seemed to glare at Emel’s internal insecurities.

“Enough. I am your Lord. If I want to promote you I will; if I want to reassign you I will. If I want to decide how you shall use your talents for my house, I will.” Those eyes almost seemed to glow in the afternoon light, as Emel stared, hypnotized by the intensity of such a gaze and the power the Duke seemed to wield effortlessly.

“Do not try my patience with useless things such as self-doubt and pity; such things have no place in my household.” The Duke leaned forward, enunciating each word clearly as if to sear his commands into Emel’s being.

“Have I made myself clear?”

Bowing in awe and gratitude at the man before him, Emel was reminded of why he had chosen to try and become a Wolf Knight for this Duke. His aura was flaring in possessiveness and protection, as it wrapped itself around Emel throughout his speech,

“Yes my Lord. Your will is my command.”

“Good. Now, go and join the others. You leave at dawn.”

Saluting once more, Emel made his way to prepare for his journey. He may be the youngest member of the team, but he refused to be the weak link that would hinder them on their mission. His lord had faith in him, and Emel was determined to deliver.

Naeva looked out the window of the carriage that her new father said would take them to their permanent home. Apparently, he was rich enough to have two homes. Maybe that shouldn’t have surprised her, given how grand the “city manor” was. Not to mention how quickly hoards of dresses and accessories were made just for her and Estelle. She was still recovering from the ordeal that was their extended fitting session.

It had been... difficult... trying to talk the veritable army of seamstresses down from the number of
jewels and ruffles they wanted to put on her wardrobe. In the end, she found some designs that were both fashionable and comfortable enough to let her move. She even convinced them to make her some outfits with pants! But, she also understood that her new position demanded a specific kind of formal wear and thus allowed them to make a few fancier dresses, just to make them happy.

...Also because she might have missed getting to dress up, just a little. Having the option to get dolled up — perhaps literally, the way some of the women coo over her and Estelle — is not something she’s experienced in a very long time. Even so, Naeva simply got copies of Estelle’s dresses; she was so tired of making fashion choices. And, well, also because it could be fun to play around with the fact that Estelle was her identical twin someday…

Naeva spotted the luggage the servants had designated as hers and Estelle’s, the sight giving her the sneaking suspicion that a lot more clothes were made for them after they had finished making their choices. It was a staggering display of wealth, even before you considered that they will have grown out of them within a few months, at their age.

The world Naeva had guessed at from inside the trunk is not quite the world she’d actually found herself in. It made her uneasy, not to know. This world was much softer than the last, but the ninja part of her screamed out to not wallow in ignorance.

So, recon.

She stood on her seat, to better see out the window of their carriage, trying to learn more about the city they had lived in. It was a bit difficult; most of her view was blocked by the crowds of people around them. They all wore identical armour and walked like warriors. They also each had their own variation of the gelel-song quietly whispering to her. She had overheard enough to know their title was ‘knights’ rather than ‘samurai,’ but she still wasn’t completely clear on their role. Obviously, at the moment, they were guards, but it seemed like an excessive number for just three people, even if one was a Duke.

...Or she might be feeling overly annoyed and disparaging because they were blocking her view. Naeva internally conceded that it could be normal in this world, to hire so many guards for travel. There could be dangers, or political rivals, or a whole host of other reasons for their extensive entourage. Naeva hadn’t forgotten the hunters and magicians in the woods, all out for her and Estelle. Could their father be that important? It burned, that she didn’t know, and she couldn’t keep her brow from furrowing as she once again lamented at how limited she was here.

“What’s wrong, Naeva?”

The deep voice of her new father pulled her out of her reverie, less because she was startled by his presence and more because she was startled by the tone. He sounded deeply concerned.

She looked at him, and his face seemed impassive as ever. But, there was a slight wrinkle to his brow, a slight sadness in his gelel-song, and she thought he really would like her to answer; he wasn’t just being polite for courtesy’s sake.

“...I wanted to see. But there are too many people outside. This is a lot of Knights, isn’t it? It could be a whole…” Naeva stumbled over the words, realizing she didn’t know any martial terms in this world’s language, much less how this army broke down “battalions” and “squads” and so on. How troublesome. “…group, of the imperial army out there.”

His lips twitched as he gently, and patiently, explained, “They are the Knights of the Black Wolf, the personal knighthood of House Castielo, equal to, but separate from, the Royal Army. Their only duties are to our family; it is not at all unreasonable to have so many of them here.”
“Your family has a whole Knighthood to protect you?” Estelle asked. She hadn’t quite gotten up the courage to copy Naeva in standing yet and had merely been looking at the parts of the sky she could see from her seat. Now she had turned, daring to look straight at their father, eyes as large as saucers.

Naeva was internally reeling, as she realized just how important their father must be.

‘Much closer to a Daimyo than a mere noble or rich man,’ She thought. So much might, seemingly the second most powerful army in the Empire, based on how he spoke of the Royal Knights. That also meant so much danger. She had so much to learn. And quickly.

“Our family has a whole Knightage to protect House Castielo,” He firmly corrected before continuing on, “Don’t worry about them blocking your view, Naeva. We’re just leaving the Capital city now. There’s not much to see but normal crowded streets and outskirts.”

Naeva tried to find a polite, age-appropriate way to say she wanted to look anyway. Estelle quickly jumped in at her hesitation. “Like the ones where we were… camping, before you found us?” Estelle asked curiously.

“Certainly not. Those were abandoned slums on the outskirts of the forest. This part of the city is plain and typical, not so different from the neighbourhood where you-” He trailed off, grimacing, as Estelle and Naeva exchanged a look at the strange reaction.

Had they upset him? Naeva thought her sister’s question was reasonably polite, but who knows what the rules were for someone powerful enough to have his own knighthood. Naeva desperately wished she knew more, particularly since she had no clue how long their father’s patience would last with their ignorance of even the most basic of things.

Yet...the next words he spoke was not a reprimand, as Naeva had half anticipated. Instead, they were gentle. “...I should have heard rumours about you two sooner.” Staring intently into their faces, her father seemed to pause again before asking them a question, “You’ve never been out of Laputain’s building...have you?”

Naeva didn’t recognize the word Laputain, but it was clear he meant that woman and considering he spat the word out, it has to mean something bad. Embarrassed, Naeva and Estelle shook their heads slowly.

Gelel’s song spiked, a loud, piercing angry note, prompting Naeva to grab for her sister’s hand, ready to bodily shield her if necessary. But as quickly as it came, the song was muted. Their father knocked on the carriage window and gestured to the guards, who moved out of the way. Then he scooped them both up into his arms, so he was holding them up to see out the window comfortably.

“This is a market district of the capital city of the empire. Our home is to the North East from here; there’s a road that directly connects us to the capital of our duchy, near our home estate…”

He continued on like that for a very long time. Naeva, and eventually Estelle, grew bold enough to ask questions about what they were seeing and learning, and he never seemed to grow agitated with their ignorance.

He was calm and clear in his explanations, and ever so patient. He seemed to know everything in the world and was willing to take her safely in his arms and share it with her and her sister. It was almost like being back on that porch, lying next to Shika and listening to Shikaku...

Naeva shook her head. That life was behind her, and she knew from experience that there was no use in hanging on to people lost. Estelle seemed to notice her momentary melancholy, for her sister...
reached out and gently squeezed Naeva’s hand. More surprising, the Duke also seemed to notice her brief moment of unhappiness.

He paused his explanations, looked down at her, and only resumed once she had glanced back at him to nod for him to continue. Even then, he stopped to kiss the top of her head before he started again. “Don’t worry, my Little Night,” he comforted, “You’ll soon be able to learn everything you want.”

“Father? Why do you call me your ‘Little Night’ and sister your ‘Star’?” She asked, feeling emboldened by his kindness and wanting to confirm a theory of hers.

“Because that is exactly what your names mean. Estelle can be translated to ‘star’ and Naeva means ‘Born in the Night’. You both are my night and stars.”

For just a moment, she felt touched. What a sweet thing to say. Almost too sweet.

Before she had a chance to analyze it though, the second meaning of her nickname came back to her. I am the Night. It was something she and Estelle had bonded over in those long hours they spent in the chest. Apparently, the show and movies had been very popular in Korea.

Naeva looked over at her sister, who smirked. Oh no. Estelle hummed a familiar tune under her breath, and Naeva realized Estelle would never let the second meaning of her nickname go.

Nananananananana BATMAN!

Laughing into her hands, Naeva leaned further into her confused yet pleased looking father’s embrace. At least some things were the same no matter which world she was born into.

Bastien Martin was certain that he would be having a very good day. His father had pulled him out of the Academy for a few days, saving him from gruelling tests his professors had planned, he had won a bet with his fellow classmates, winning double his allowance and he had managed to bed the new maid at the Academy.

He sighed in satisfaction and leaned back to stare at the city as he enjoyed his carriage ride home, remembering her cries. Bastien licked his lips in anticipation of the next time he saw that mouthy little minx. Women like her were as common as dirt; all he had to do was snap his fingers and any woman would be willing to pull up their skirts and go on their backs for him. The kinky little whore had certainly enjoyed almost being caught, as he had his way with her in front of the open windows.

Just before being pulled out from the Academy, his father had sent him a letter, notifying him that a mixed Castielo child had been recently discovered and unlike the past mixed children, this time around it was a girl, rumoured to have pink eyes instead of red. And Bastien was the one who would get to breed her.

Nearly drooling at the thought of getting to ruin a toy from the dreaded Demon House, Bastien promised himself to savour every moment. The very notion of dominating a mixed girl of that House made his blood boil with lust at the thought of it.

Nearing his home, Bastien wondered if there would be a new toy break in to take care of his needs, once he arrived back home. He was already bored with the maids and other female staff who had worked there on his last break. But it’s been weeks since he’s been home. Hopefully, there would be some new blood by now; his father’s tastes were as fickle as his own, so Bastien got to enjoy the benefits of having an ever-changing staff of young women.
Some other boys might feel disgusted knowing that their father slept with the same women he did, but honestly, it just made things more exciting for him. There was nothing he loved more than getting a woman drunk on his body, and her choosing him over his father every night. In fact, there had been this one little strumpet that had been obsessed with being with him, to the point that she had gotten pregnant by the time he had gone back to school.

He had ordered her to get rid of the child, but even if she hadn’t, it’s no big deal. The wizards would give him a pretty penny for a babe. Thinking of the wizards reminded Bastien of his impending treat. The anticipation made him impatient. He couldn’t wait until he got home. He needed to work out some of his frustrations now.

He rapped his knuckles on the roof of the carriage, signalling the change in plans to his driver. Bastien smiled as he hopped out of his carriage and began looking for a decent looking whore to satisfy his lust. Catching the eye of a bakery wench, he smiled broadly as he swaggered his way to the store. Pulling out a handful of gold coins, Bastien chuckled as the baker almost fell over in his greed to accommodate him.

‘It’s just like father says, everyone can be bought, you just have to know what the price is.’

‘Why was everything going wrong today?!” Lady Winifred ‘Wini’ Martin mentally cried. She had spent the whole morning trying to get the house ready for her sweet boy’s return from the Academy, yet everywhere she turned she found more problems to fix.

The head maid had been held up in her husband’s study for hours, and a loud thump and cry had echoed down the stairs from the room at one point. She wondered if the maid had fallen and hurt herself again?

‘That woman is too clumsy for her position. Honestly, what was my husband thinking? Hiring a green schoolgirl for such a position?’ Every time she saw the girl she was returning from some meeting with her husband, limping and hobbling down the halls, with a glazed dreamy look in her eyes.

‘The girl clearly is not fit for this role. Plus she clearly has been stealing some food from the kitchens, her belly had begun to grow big these last two months. I’ll have to make a posting for the newspaper soon about the new opening for the role.’ Massaging her head, Winifred wearily made her way to her room, planning on resting for a bit before her eldest baby boy arrived.

Opening the door, she froze at the unseemly and vulgar sight before her.

“What the hell do you think you are doing, you-you whore!”

Laying on her and her husband's bed was a naked young maid, legs spread and a seductive smile quickly fading to a look of mortification. The whore was wearing the necklace her husband had given her for their tenth anniversary and had his shirt partially covering her arms and breasts.

Grabbing her by her arm, Lady Martin dragged the wretch through the halls, fully prepared to kick out the impudent whore out on the streets with nary a stitch on her.

Throwing her unto the steps before the foyer, she began to scream her pent up frustrations at the girl.

“How dare you attempt to seduce your lord, my husband, in such a shameless and unseemly manner! Get out, you whore! And may the alleyways take you and all your kind who would dare tempt a married man with such dishonest thoughts!”
Ripping her necklace from the wench, Winifred continued to shame the girl, utterly upset at the idea of her poor love being targeted by such a scheming and traitorous wench. She wished the maids and servants he hired weren’t beautiful young women. Her lord was such a kind soul, taking pity on such creatures and bringing them in from their unfortunate circumstances and low birth. She understood the poor girls’ attraction. Her husband cut a fine figure for a man his age, making many a woman look at him longingly. Still, the fact that one of the low-based wretches actually tried to make a move on him, to take advantage of his kindness...such a thing was unforgivable.

“Mother? Is something the matter?”

Stopping her shrieking, Lady Martin turned to see her beloved baby boy, finally home, staring at her worriedly as he stood by the door.

“Bastien! My darling boy!” Moving to give her eldest a hug, Lady Martin tried to hide the girl's shameful body from her innocent baby’s eyes.

“I’ve missed you so much. You must be starving after such a long ride.” Pulling away from him, she cupped his face in her palms and brushed his unruly hair to the side. He always did seem to have a permanent case of bed hair.

“It’s alright, I stopped by a bakery on my way home and had a bite to eat. It was filling and very satisfying so I’m not too hungry right now. But enough about me, mother what is going on?”

“...I suppose you are old enough to know...no, it’s better that you know. So you can protect yourself and your baby brother from such distasteful women, who would try and worm their ways into your lives.” Pulling him away from the foyer, Winifred didn’t notice her son sending a heated look at the partially naked woman sitting on the steps, and give a silent command to have her wait in his room.

Settling down in a comfortable sofa, Lady Martin gently took her Bastien’s hands and tried to find the right words to explain what had happened.

“Son...there are some women out there who are not as well bred or respectable as others of our station. They are conniving and will use many tricks to try and trap you into marriage or tempt you away from your duty, breaking your honour and becoming a stain on your character.” Lady Winifred prayed her son was understanding her delicate words. This was such an uncomfortable conversation.

“They will use their bodies in shameless ways and try and try and harm the good women in your life through their jealousy. Unfortunately, one such snake found her way into our home and tried to lay in wait for your poor, overworked father. Instead, I found her and have fired her from our household.”

Her Bastien smiled gently at her in such an understanding way, he truly was a brilliant boy. Lady Martin smiled back as he gripped her hands tighter, vowing before her to do his part as the heir of the family and do a thorough search among all the maids and female staff. He swore that no other snake would be left in our home when he was through.

“...Of course, I will be conducting these interviews in my room and need to talk with them for lengthy periods of time. Ignore any strange sounds you might hear mother, for I’m afraid I will have to intimidate them so that they bend to my will.” He looked so grown up as he turned to gaze intently at the nearby maids. The girls seemed to grow weak in the knees at the sight and shivered as he stared them down. One even began to pant erratically, causing Winifred to wonder if she was growing nervous at the thought of being interrogated.

“My brave, loyal son. Thank you. You are a credit to our family.”
His smile filled her heart with joy. She truly was blessed to have two wonderful sons and a loving man for a husband. She thanked the gods every day that she had met her husband in that fateful ball.

‘He was so adorable yet dashing! Secreted away in a closet while helping a maid up after startling her in his haste to hide from the intimidating masses. Such a cute and shy man, who would have guessed he would grow into himself and become such a confident and silver-tongued Lord?’ Lightly swooning as she thought back to those precious memories, Winifred found herself coming back to the present at the site of her son kneeling before her.

“Bastien?”

“Before I start my search among the staff, I want to make sure my baby brother is safe from such exposure. Do you happen to know where he is?”

Heart touched at the care and concern her eldest showed for his younger son, Lady Martin gave him a kiss on his forehead.

“Mercer is studying in the library. He’s been there all morning and hasn’t stopped for dinner yet.” Placing a hand against her cheek, she began to mutter at how much he was growing to be just like his older brother.

“I remember when you used to lock yourself away in the library, getting the maids to help you organize the books because they just weren’t to your tastes. Though I do wish they would be less clumsy…” She mused, internally wondering why so many girls nowadays couldn’t walk straight or kept bumping into things behind locked doors.

“…I see. Thank you for your help mother.” Melting at her son’s cute smile, she resisted the urge to ruffle his hair and pinch his cheeks. No matter how old he got, he’d still be her precious baby boy, still, she would do her best to respect his dignity as a man.

“Of course darling.”

Lady Winifred hummed to herself as she went out to get everything ready for dinner. All of her wonderful men would be eating with her tonight, so perfection was key.

Not even an hour later, she startled in fright as she heard her eldest scream from the closed library.

“THEY’RE TWINS?!”

Concerned at the tone and strange words, Winifred made a mental note to push her husband into speaking with their boy. A man to man talk would be the best choice of action when it comes to these things. She prayed that she lived long enough to see her sons grow into fine men, just like their father.

End of Chapter 8
‘Why am I doing this again?’ He thought, staring dispassionately at the note on his desk. He had finally managed to complete all his tasks for *that* man and had planned to spend his reward money that evening. Yet here he was, not even finished eating his dinner, receiving another letter from that asshole, contracting him for another job.

‘Nope. I’m just not gonna do it. No way am I going to risk my neck for some irritating, intimidating, bastard... who has more political power in his pinky than I do through all my contacts.’ Pausing in thought, he suddenly had a flashback of all the ways he had seen *that* man brutally destroy those he deemed his enemies.

Sighing loudly, he quickly shoved the rest of his meal into his mouth before taking out his knives and equipment. Grumbling to himself, he swore to raise his prices for the last minute mission. It’s not like the asshole couldn’t afford it, he growled as he strapped the weapons onto himself. He would have to work all night again to get the first part of the mission done. If *that* man wasn’t so rich and powerful, he’d ignore his orders and just do whatever he wanted. Pulling out his wig, he carefully fixed his makeup and dress, checking from every angle possible that his disguise would pass inspection.

Smiling at the mirror, he watched in approval as a sultry and well endowed young woman smiled back at him.

‘No one questions a whore why she’s hanging around shady bars at this time of night.’ Tying his bag to his inner thigh, he quickly fixed his skirt before making his way into the streets.

Many guards and knights standing by the various establishments whistled at him as he sauntered by. Making sure to play his role perfectly, he blew kisses, teased a few of the ones closest to him, and made sure to plant a poisoned kiss on one of the more persistent ones. It was just common sense to wear lipstick with a powerful sleeping potion laced through it.

Smirking as the guard started to sway, he made sure to push him against the wall and steal his gold for the delay. Finally reaching the alleyway which connected to the back entrance of the Lediable bar, he found the man guarding it looking bored as he beat up some stupid brat trying to get inside. Sauntering up to the man with the smirk, he couldn’t help but mentally gag as the man immediately lowered his guard at the sight of a beautiful whore making their way to him.

‘What a rookie. Ugh, this is going to be too easy.’ If he’s going to keep getting dragged out for these missions without rest, they could at least be *fun* ones.
Pressing himself against the thug’s chest, he began to whisper sweet nothings of what he’d like to do with him if he stepped away from the door. The disgusting man began to paw at his fake chest and legs. It pissed him off, as the brute obviously didn’t care for his pleasure or comfort in his handling.

Sliding his ring around, he gently pressed on the side, revealing a poison needle from the decorative piece. He stabbed it into the back of the guard’s neck. When his target slumped a few moments later, he quickly grabbed the unconscious man and stripped him of his clothes. Switching his dress for the smelly but discreet guards clothes, he made his way into the bar and down the stairs to the underground black market. Making his way further to the center, he browsed from stall to stall, wondering if he’d find anything worth buying as he waited for the signal.

Gold dragons and fake holy items gleamed on the shabby looking stall tables, peppered with rubies, emeralds and many other gems. Small pieces of soul gems gleamed in various items, too small for the fortune these con artists were selling them at. Huffing in amusement at the ignorance of some of the shoppers, he absently noticed more and more assassins slipping between the stalls, and experienced mercenaries streaming out of the bars and blacksmiths.

Just when he was ready to steal something for the fun of it, a burly man gave a discreet whistle.

Making sure to make another round through the stalls, he slipped into a partially hidden side door, where a series of assassins and mercenaries stood by a wizard with a map depicting the Country Manor of the Demon Duke.

Smirking at the sight, he made sure to maneuver himself closer as they all began to argue and fight. The reward money was insane if they managed to pull this heist, prompting many mercenaries to challenge each other to spars and assassinations to take each other out. Only the strongest would be left to take this mission. He smiled gleefully as he put down another weak-ass mercenary. That reward money was his! He definitely deserved it after all the shit he had gone through completing his mission. No way would some pansy assassins and worthless mercenaries stop him from being one of the men assigned to break into the manor.

‘They’ll never see me coming.’ He thought, chuckling as he stabbed another man.

The wizard’s gleaming eyes glowed with power as he finished his opponent.

“You in the brown cloak! You pass! Join the others in the next room. You are worthy to take this mission.” The wizard smirked, waving at another door hidden behind his robe.
Slipping through the passageway, he shivered as a malicious feeling pressed down on him. The screams of the dying reached a fevered pitch before cutting off, leaving only silence behind him.

‘What the fuck did I get myself into?’ Sweating slightly in fear, he pressed on forward cursing *that* man in every language he knew.

Ein breathed a small sigh of relief as he finally carried his daughters into their ancestral home. Who would have thought so much emotion could come from such tiny girls. They’ve somehow managed to make him feel more in these last few days compared to the last few years.

Their very existence has made him feel various degrees of terrified since he was first notified. They’re so small and delicate, and there are so many *bastards* who would hurt them, or take them from him. Bastards who would do anything to get their hands on their flesh and blood. But now, with both of his daughters nestled safely in his arms, in the most secure place, they could be… he felt he could allow himself to relax. Slightly.

He met Annie standing in his bedchamber. Rooms had been prepared for the girls, of course, but Ein couldn’t yet bear to part with them. He let her take one of his daughters and both of them carefully dressed the girls into their nightgowns. Stepping back, he watched as she took great care not to wake them as she tucked them into his bed.

“Are they okay? They fell asleep so quickly… They slept through most of the carriage ride as well. They also slept in this morning. Considering everything…” Ein didn’t turn to Annie to ask his question. He couldn’t tear his eyes off of the small but steady rise and fall of the twins’ chests. Proof that they yet breathed, that their long, unnatural stillness is merely sleep.

“Yes, My Lord. Normal children at their age need lots of sleep. And since the Ladies are so ill, they will need more rest than others. Leave them be, Milord. This is how they will gain strength and heal.”

Ein grimaced, reminded once again of his failures, and of that woman’s sins. His partially-human little girls, already so fragile, made even weaker by neglect and abuse. *His Night and Stars* injured by the hands of that whore. He watched his precious little girls sleep, unconsciously clapping their hands and cuddling close together. How could anyone with even a shred of a soul raise a hand to such Angels?
Ein hated humans by instinct; it was an indescribable feeling that screamed at him that these were lesser beings. Sometimes though... Sometimes he could actually put words to his hatred and know how to explain the very depths of human depravity. It was during these times that Ein knew he it wasn't wrong to hate them at all. It was a shame that there are only a handful of humans that had enough common sense for him to tolerate them.

“How else do I help them?” he asked Annie, still not turning away. Three years, he failed them. He can at least do his best to help them now.

“You’re already doing everything you can, My Lord. They are fed and protected and are allowed to rest comfortably… we will all take care of them, and through our care and support, they will heal. All you need to do, Milord, is just be there for them. These children need your love.” Giving a curtsy, Annie made her way out of the room, leaving the Duke in his dimly lit room, pondering her words as he guarded over his children.

Love. Such a tenuous thing, for one like himself. It was so rare that he could even truly care for those around him. But somehow, with his children, it came naturally. He loved them so much it hurts; quite a feat when he is normally so difficult to injure. If that was what they needed from him, then he was happy to oblige.

Estelle began to stir unhappily in her sleep. Her little noises of discomfort pulled at Ein’s heart. Nightmares. He hadn’t been familiar with such things until his daughters had appeared, and now he finally had something to fear.

Ein laid down next to the twins, closest to Estelle’s side, and carefully enveloped her within his arms. He wrapped his aura like a blanket over them, and she melted into his embrace and her whimpers died down. She slept peacefully once again.

Ein pressed a kiss to her hair and closed his own eyes. He would sleep here, for now. Annie seemed to be right that this was something he could do to help the girls. He would love them with all the strength of a Castielo.

If Naeva were a normal child, she'd be jolting awake with a scream at the sight of all the horrors that plagued her dreams.

Luckily for the household, Naeva was not a normal child. She had once lived as Shikako Nara, the Corpse Princess, a Konoha ninja of great power and paranoia, upon with all the instincts that came with that. And she had just spent the last three years deep in enemy territory. So, she was not jolted
awake by her nightmare. Years — lifetimes — of training kept her still, she continued deep, even breathing belying the racing of her heart.

Without opening her eyes, she cast out her senses, to better get her bearings. She was somewhere soft and warm. Estelle held her hand and was sleeping peacefully beside her. On Estelle’s other side was the fierce fire-shadow-love of their new father’s aura. Their trip that day came back to her, and she realized that they must have arrived at their second new home. Content that she was probably safe, despite the lingering fear form her sleep, she risked opening her eyes.

Everything was as she had expected. Estelle, clasping her hand, looking peaceful and even happy in her sleep, sandwiched between her family as she was. Their father had fallen asleep at Estelle’s slide, and she had curled up into his safe warmth. He had, in turn, conformed to her, one arm safely around her, comforting and protective all at once.

Naeva smiled. It eased some of the tension she had carried around, to see her sister happy, loved, and safe. But, when she closed her eyes to try to go back to sleep, she found her thoughts dragged away from such cozy comforts, and back to the less pleasant things her brain could conjure. Eventually, she gave it up as hopeless, and she has never been one to dwell when there was something she could actually be doing.

Naeva carefully extracted her hand from Estelle’s, causing her sister to roll towards their father and snuggle into him even tighter. Her shifting made it easier for Naeva to slip off the bed and onto the floor.

There should be something interesting in this grand place to distract her from her dark thoughts. If nothing else, perhaps she would find the kitchen. Estelle had commented that in her past life she had loved sweets with a passion. Stashing her sister’s comfort food around the manor for late night snacks would be easy for Naeva. Also, a cup of tea wouldn’t be remiss. Yoshi- She had always made Naeva a cup when she was stressed and up late working.

With all the stealth of the Cat’s Paw, she slipped out of her room, past the guards, and began to investigate the halls of this new manor.

Count Servan sighed as he put away the latest letter from the Emperor. It seemed Duke Castielo had discovered that he had more children than just his son. The count had heard the rumours a few days ago, but it seems that instead of the expected pure Castielo child, the children — more than one child! — were two mixed daughters with pink eyes.
‘I can think of a handful of nobles who would want to get those girls married into their families.’ he mused, wondering if Lord Martin and his cronies were behind the wild manhunt that had exploded on the streets of the city. Looking over the reports from his spies, they noted that there are whispers that the Duke had set the forest on fire as a way to flush out all the nobles who had joined the search. Scoffing at such rubbish, Count Servan wondered how it was possible to be so stupid in regards to understanding Duke Castielo.

‘It’s not like the man is particularly subtle. Everyone should know by now that the Castielo family cares about two things; family and vengeance. Everything else is just background information.’ smirking at the thought, he grabbed some parchment and began to pen a letter, ‘That’s what makes him so easy to maneuver if you know how to pressure him.’

Finishing the letter with a flourish he rang for his butler to mail it out with all haste. Glancing at the small painted portrait on his desk, he wistfully picked it up and stroked the young woman’s face.

‘Soon my dear, I will secure you your future. You won’t suffer the same fate she did. I swear that so long as I take a breath, I will never stop trying.’ The sunset cast shadows on his face, as the darkness began to spread across his study. Wizards, nobles, even the Emperor were all blind fools. They wouldn’t realize the grand opportunity this presented for him.

‘That fat Emperor has no idea what is happening underneath his nose. If he continues to go down his path someday he’ll realize what a fool he has been. Humiliation can be a dangerous thing for powerful men.’

Count Servan was old enough to remember the Old Emperor when he was in power. Duke Castielo’s father had made a fool of him in a tourney, causing the Emperor to plot the death of the Old Duke and spark a war that lasted years with their neighbouring country.

Count Servan once again looked over the Emperor’s letter, before dropping it on his desk in disgust. Mass destruction happened when the Royal Family tried to tighten the collar on the House of Castielo. As this past week should have made clear. It didn’t escape the Count’s notice that at least a few of the spotted mercenaries were known to have ties to the crown.

‘Of course not just anyone can bend that family to their will. They are all emotionless killing machines, with a lust for battle.’

He recalled the day he served with Duke Castielo on the front lines. The enemy soldiers had taken to
running away at the sight of the Duke slashing his sword about. No mercy was given, and no movement had been wasted in his executions. Closing his eyes, he lost himself to the memory.

Servan stared, pale as the enemy advanced, pushing them to retreat further inland. Just when all hope seemed lost he had appeared. Red eyes gleamed in glee as he slashed and slaughtered any man who stood in his path. His Wolf Knights had arrived with him, causing the tide of the battle to change drastically as the enemy began to run away from the battlefield.

“Fall back! Fall back!”

“Deploy the archers!”

“It’s not working, he’s gaining ground!”

“Quick! Get the -”

That sword had split the head of the enemy commander in two, as he had darted to and fro, barely visible to the naked eye.

Servan had nearly collapsed in awe and fear as the very men who had caused him and his troop’s so much trouble were destroyed so easily in front of him. Ever since that moment, he has truly understood the power of the Castielo and worked tirelessly to ensure that such a threat was not left poised at his back.

Snapping out of his memories, Count Servan gently placed the portrait of the smiling young girl, back onto his desk. He tried to picture what two daughters of House Castielo might be like.

‘...I wonder, will those girls inherit the same bloodthirst that runs in the Castielo line?’ He pondered, making his way out of his study and down the hall, ‘Will they be the weak point that finally brings the family down to ruin? Or will they be something else? Something entirely new, that might shake up this miserable, stagnant world?’
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