

# A Touch of Softness

Written By: Teuchi77

Proofread By: OneHandedTypist

## Author's Note

This is yet another first for me. The first time I've ever written erotica for a contest. Suffice it to say, this was a completely different, yet still emotionally satisfying experience for me. I took a different approach to writing this story, and I'm incredibly proud of how it came out.

Massive thanks to OneHandedTypist for not only proofreading, but providing feedback that changed the course of this story for the better. I do not think this would be nearly as good without their invaluable input.

With that out of the way, I hope you enjoy it!

This story contains:

Breast Expansion, Sex, Lactation, SSBBW/Immobility, Vulgar Language and References to Prostitution.

## Chapter 1

The city of Navara was at its prettiest when dusk fell. The beautiful orange sky would loom over the city's facade, as Navara itself would meet the sky's golden rays with its own. The city would light up, reflecting on the water-filled canals and painting a picture of a place one could only dream of.

Dorien Kest thought so, anyway. He stood on the balcony of his villa, a swanky new place he'd bought recently. Life truly couldn't get any better. He had the backing of both the Marrow Syndicate and House Belladonna. It was said that getting into good graces with just one of them would guarantee luxury.

Dumbasses, the lot of them. They were too drunk on their own power to realize what he was planning. What were people even scared of? Their wrath was only problematic if one earned it. And he? Well, he was but a humble merchant.

"Dori? What's taking you so long! I'm hungry!"

A familiar voice echoed from inside his house. Ah, Marinette. His humble wife. Not so humble anymore, to be honest. Ever since she'd leeches her way into luxury, she'd been getting too comfortable.

"Coming, dear."

Well, not that it mattered. His dullard of a wife was the least of his concerns. He only needed her to dress well and cling to his side like the brainless set of tits that she was.

As he re-entered, he looked at her. As much as he didn't care for Marinette's mind, her looks were why he'd married her. Her purple eyes were like amethysts, gazing lovingly into his own. Her long raven hair fluttered in the air as she sauntered up to him, as he could smell the familiar hint of lavender emanating from her.

She was cocky today. It wasn't often she'd wear something as revealing as this black and gold dress. Her cleavage was on full display, as was one of her succulent legs. This bitch had the gall to tease him after all he'd given her.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Of course." She spoke in a hushed, honeyed tone.

The two of them headed over to the dining room, where Dorien's personal chef had prepared a decadent feast for him to enjoy. It was the end of the week, a long, stressful week. He deserved this, not only for his accomplishments but for his grand plan for this city. To turn Navara into the city he desired. To wrench it from the hands of the corrupt buffoons running it from the shadows.

"He made gelatos as well! I can't wait!" Marinette squeaked.

"Dessert comes at the end, dear. I hear Mr. Lucio's shrimp risotto is to die for." Dorien said, sitting down to enjoy his meal. They ate in relative silence. Marinette was better to be looked at, not heard.

"You look a lot happier today, honey." Marinette spoke again, as he looked up from his plate at her loving gaze. "You were very tense this week. I could tell!"

"Work tends to be that way, Marinette. But don't you worry your pretty little head. Far be it from you to be concerned about my work."

"Well, it's because of your work that we purchased this lovely house. I think it would be rude of me not to appreciate you more for it." she smiled.

Hah. Maybe she wasn't as stupid as he thought. This was new for her, though. She was actually trying to pay him back for the life he'd so graciously given her.

"Oh, my dear Marinette. You're too kind," he smirked, his hand reaching out to cup her cheek. Her olive skin was smooth to the touch, not a single blemish to be found. "I'm happy you're finally understanding the gravity of what I'm doing. What I have planned."

"And what do you have planned, my love?"

Dorien looked out the window. "A Navara where we can walk out at night. Alone. A Navara where we can go to a club and enjoy ourselves without worrying about those Vipers throwing their weight around. A Navara with a government that actually listens."

Marinette tilted her head like a confused chicken. "That sounds... amazing! How will you do it?"

"If only it were so simple, my dear. I've been planning this for quite a while, you know. Those Marrow thugs didn't even notice that half their cut vanished. They've gotten lazy. Fat. So have the Belladonna. They think they own this city. Everyone does. But all it takes is one piece on the board that they can't control. That 'piece' came in this week."

Dorien got up, his wooden chair skidding across the floor as he washed his hands. "It was the source of my troubles."

Marinette followed obediently. "You've been stressed all week for *that*? It must be extraordinary..."

He smirked. "Only one of the most precious resources in the world, my dear. Something that could change the way society works."

"W-we have something that precious?"

"Normally, we wouldn't. Those Belladonna vultures would've snapped it all up. But I kept this from them. Once they find out, it'll be too late, regardless. This world is getting too full of mages who play God."

His wife's eyes lit up in amazement, looking at him as if he were the smartest man in the world. Good. He was a genius. He deserved her appraisal.

"You're amazing, dear." She hugged him. "I'm so happy I got married to you. Sometimes I feel like... you're the only man in the world who cares for me. I don't know where I'd be without you."

In some filthy strip club, he imagined. Yet, he couldn't help but derive satisfaction from this. His dumb wife, finally telling him what he'd known for years. He was amazing.

"Please, Marinette. I don't deserve such praise. I-"

His lips were caught in a kiss. His eyes crinkled in satisfaction, leaning in with a moan. She pulled back, smiling ear-to-ear. "You do. You wonderful, brilliant man. This resource? We can sell it and get even richer, can't we? If we keep it in the basement forever, won't a maid find it?"

"You make it sound like it's some jewel, dear. It isn't. It's even more valuable than that. And besides, it's not in the basement. I'm not stupid enough to keep it there. No, I kept it where the maids never look."

She giggled. "I see! I'll leave that all up to you, honey. But I still think you deserve a reward from me. I'm sorry for not giving it to you sooner." she blushed.

He couldn't help but chuckle salaciously. "So that's why you wore this dress, hm? Clever girl."

She smirked, beckoning him to follow her.

They entered his bedroom as he pushed her against the wall. "Take it off. I want to savor this."

Marinette's cheeks went red before she averted her gaze and giggled softly. "So forward. As expected from the man I love. Thank you so much, Dori."

"Go on, Marinette. What are you thankful for?"

"Oh, a great many things. Chief among them, though..." her voice trailed off, as she met his gaze. Something was different. "Thank you for telling me where the Nullstone is."

"What-?!"

Dorien didn't even have time to process what she said before she kicked his legs out from under him and pinned him to the floor. Her strength was enough to prevent him from moving, as she pinned one of his arms with her leg and held his neck in her grasp.

"M-Marinette?! What are you doing? What is this?!" he choked out.

Her face soured immediately. "Ground floor. In your study. Inside the steel cabinet. That's where it is, isn't it?"

"Y-You-!"

"You had a maid fired because she tried to open it last week, didn't you? Don't bother lying."

"What the fuck are you doing?! Let go of me at once, you bitch! How dare you betray me!?"

Dorien gasped as she pulled a golden dagger from her stockings. "This isn't a betrayal. This is an execution. Marinette hasn't been here for weeks."

"What?"

"House Belladonna sends its regards."

He barely had time to blubber out a cry of fear before her dagger slit his throat.

---

Finding the Nullstone was simple enough. The metal cabinet was old and rickety. Enough force allowed her to wrench it open without the key. There it was, an amount that was minuscule yet incredibly dangerous all the same; encased in a steel box. She grabbed a nearby rucksack and stuffed it in.

Marinette picked up the- wait.

Her name wasn't Marinette.

She took a breath, looking at her own hands, which weren't truly hers.

"I'm not Marinette, I'm..." she trailed off as she looked in the mirror, muttering to herself. "I work for the Belladonna. This is all part of my mission. My name is... Irida. That's right. That's my name. Irida Belladonna."

She sighed, her posture slumping slightly, no longer needing to maintain the character. She still looked like said character, which was something she'd resolve later. She needed to get out of here before the maids found out about Dori. Wait, no. Dorien. Dorien Kest. Right.

She jumped through the window, bag in tow, as she heard screaming coming from the first floor. His body was likely found. She leapt onto a nearby street lamp, using it to propel herself onto another rooftop.

She surveyed the city, now drenched by the night's darkness. She needed to get to the Palazzo. It was rather far from here on foot, a risk she'd have to take.

That was until she heard footsteps around the corner, dodging as a blue bolt whizzed past her cheek. "Shit!"

A woman in a blue pantsuit made her presence known on the rooftop along with her. Her long platinum blonde hair glistened in the moonlight, as her ice-blue eyes regarded Irida wordlessly. She was absurdly pretty. Her skin was as pale as the white gloves she wore. Her dark blue blazer and trousers complemented her eyes; the buttons strained over her huge bust. A sapphire tie and a black button-up completed the look. "You there. Marinette Kest? What you're holding is Marrow Syndicate property. You will return it at once."

Irida blinked. "I refuse."

The woman's gaze hardened. "I wasn't asking."

Irida smirked. "So?"

She made a break for it, dodging the woman's bolts. She knew who it was, of course. Séverine Kade. One of the Marrow Syndicate's prized assassins. It seems they finally cottoned onto Dorien's machinations too, though unfortunately a little too late.

Irida ran across the tiles of one roof, leaping off a chimney onto an adjacent structure. She dodged two more of Séverine's bolts. Those attacks were pure concussive force. If she were to be even glanced by just one, she'd be sent hurtling down to her death.

Séverine's footsteps multiplied. She wasn't alone. Fantastic.

Irida saw a man trying to cut off her escape as she rolled to avoid a right hook. He unsheathed a pistol, firing off rounds that just barely missed her. She leapt off the rooftop into a garden, grunting as she collided with the grass. She'd minimized the impact, but it still wasn't painless.

Séverine's men surrounded her.

"Hand over the Nullstone, and we'll let you go."

Irida scoffed. "You cannot expect me to believe that."

Séverine rolled her eyes. "Get her."

The men all rushed Irida, as she drew daggers and weaved through their attacks. She went low, slicing one of their legs and then kicking them into their compatriots. One man drew a pistol, only for her to fling the knife through the weapon and into his shoulder, as he groaned in pain. She threw her other knife into a would-be attacker's head, narrowly dodging a bolt from Séverine.

She jammed her shoulder into one of the burlier enemies, using him as a human shield to block some bullets before leaping over him and grabbing another goon's handgun, shooting him and two others. The gun was then immediately shot out of her hands by Séverine, who narrowed her eyes.

"Such skill from a noble is unexpected. And suspicious." she drawled.

Irida smirked, "Is it too hard to believe that little old me could take out your friends?"

Séverine scowled. "Oh. It's *you*."

The shapeshifter sighed. "I'm a little hurt that it took you this long to realize. You've seen my moves up close plenty of times."

"It doesn't make a difference, Irida. Hand over the Nullstone. Now."

"This is actually Belladonna property, per our agreement with Dorien."

"An agreement made without our knowledge."

"I fail to see how that's my problem."

Séverine fired more of her blue bolts at her, as Irida got closer. Séverine was powerful at range, but up close she was far weaker. Irida ducked under a blind jab, kicking her in the back and using it to launch herself.

Before Irida could clear the distance, however, Séverine reached back and grabbed the rucksack containing the Nullstone.

"Tch!"

The two wrestled over the bag, as Séverine kicked Irida in the gut, as she wheezed, losing her grip as she tumbled away. Before Séverine could escape, Irida pulled a knife out from one of the dead henchmen's corpses and flung it at Séverine's shoulder. It left a laceration as the mage yelped, dropping the rucksack.

Irida dove to grab it, taking off at full speed. Séverine fired a bolt at her, Irida blocking it with the rucksack. Her enemy couldn't give chase now, not with that shoulder wound. She was in the home stretch. She avoided a few more blue bolts until a stray one grazed her back, sending her tumbling off a roof and onto the ground.

She groaned in pain. She'd definitely injured something. She'd done this long enough to know that much, though it thankfully wasn't too high a fall.

She needed to get clear of this place. The Palazzo was not far.

"There you are."

A familiar voice echoed from an alleyway. A voice she wasn't happy to hear.

"Lucien."

Lucien stepped out of the shadows. He smirked as if he'd done anything to help. His piercing red eyes stood out in the night. He wore his typical gaudy ensemble. A red shirt, black trousers and a terribly gauche blazer with golden dragon patterns on it.

"You look tired. Did you hurt something?" he walked up to her.

"Don't touch me." she batted away his hand.

He scoffed. "Shut the fuck up. You don't get to play haughty after you nearly screwed up the mission, you slut. If the boss had sent me from the start, things would've been a cakewalk."

"I don't think Dorien Kest was into men as ugly as you." She smirked. "Besides, Val always trusts me with the important things. I didn't let her down tonight, did I?"

"Always so goddamn smug," he gritted his teeth. "Hand over the Nullstone, I'll take it back to the Palazzo."

"What?"

"Did I stutter?" he barked. "Hand it over. Your job is done."

"How long have you been tracking me?"

"Long enough."

"And you never once thought to step in? To help?"

He sneered. "I thought you could handle it? If you couldn't, I don't see why you're Belladonna's most prized asset. I'm doing you a favour. Give it to me and go home. Besides, it's smart to hand it off to someone else so the Marrow Syndicate doesn't know who has it."

"Lucien you bastard-"

He snatched it from her. She tried to resist, but her ribs were acting up. She grunted as he hefted the rucksack. "Seems like a sizeable amount. Not bad." However, as he turned it around, he scoffed. "But clearly, they should never send a bitch to do a real man's job."

Irida's eyes widened as he showed her the tear in the rucksack. Séverine's bolt had not only torn open the bag, but made a crack in the metal container as well. The Nullstone, which seemed more like dust, was leaking out.

"Shit."

"Thanks to you, the cargo is damaged. Good job, dumbass."

"It'd have been fine if you'd actually helped, Lucien!"

He scoffed. "Cry all you want. This is your fuck up, not mine. Good luck, *Mirror*."

Irida loosened up and sighed. "I'll meet her tomorrow. Don't you dare make shit up about what happened."

He smirked. "No promises."

Before she could say much more, he ran off. Coward.

She felt her ribs. Definitely bruised, but nothing a healing salve couldn't fix. Either way, she had to go back to normal.

The way back home was quiet.

She owned a nice condo in an apartment building near the more affluent part of Navara. It was spacious, cozy, and unproblematic. A little too spacious, in fact. There was so much room that she barely knew what to do with it. She didn't get to spend much time at the place, so it didn't quite feel like home. She walked inside, looking around at the barren white walls.

She was going to buy a plant to spice it up, but it'd die soon because of her job, anyway. The minimalist life was good for her, she thought.

She went over to the mirror. Her magic was incredibly useful in that it didn't take mana to maintain her form. It only took mana to change it. So she could masquerade as Marinette for weeks with no issue. Now all she had to do was shift back to her usual self.

First came the skin tone, which was the easiest. In a place as sunny as Navara, a lot of residents had a natural tan. Irida was not one of them. She burned a lot easier than she tanned, as Marinette's olive skin turned paler to reflect Irida's.

Next was the hair. It was shorter than Marinette's, a little less flowy, but otherwise about the same. Body wise, Marinette was ever so slightly bustier than her, and obviously less muscular. She'd cheated with the shapeshifting, giving 'her' Marinette enough muscle to fight well. It's not like Dorian would've noticed. With her bust, Irida could've kept Marinette's D-cup, but she didn't want to.

Her body was sacred.

Onto her face. The hardest part. But she'd done this enough times to remember. It had been a long time since she got to be Irida. Even before the Marinette job, she'd been on two other back-to-back missions. Regardless, this was simple.

Nice, golden eyes. Like a cat.

Nose slightly smaller.

Eyes slightly closer together.

Wait.

That didn't look right.

"Heh. No way. This is weird." Irida muttered to herself.

Again.

Eyes closer together. Make them ever so slightly bigger, too.

Shit. No. That didn't look right.

What was happening?

"It's the lips. Has to be the lips." She chuckled to herself.

Make the lips thinner. She isn't a whore.

There. Now just-

No.

That didn't look right.

Irida took a deep breath. "This is bullshit. I know this. I know what I look like."

She tried again. New mindset. Don't panic. She just needed to stay calm. She had done this so many times before. She was born like this. This is who Irida Belladonna was. This was *her*. If she couldn't remember what she looked like...

Who was she?

Make the eyelashes longer. Eyebrows thinner.

Move the mouth down a little.

No. No. No. No.

"No... It doesn't look right." She said, her voice weak. "I-I..."

She covered her face with her hands. Why was this happening? This never happened before! She'd never forgotten her own fucking face before!

Her fingers trembled as she reached around her dresser. She needed a reference image. For her own face. Irida had forgotten what she looked like. How? How could she forget her own face!?

She grabbed a picture frame of herself two years ago. This was her at the Navara Gala. Fun times. She was wearing such a nice dress, too. Her mother's dress.

Did she have these issues? Did she forget her own face? Irida would have loved to ask her.

She looked back and forth between the mirror and the picture. Okay. She was getting it. Eyes, nose, lips, mouth, eyelashes, eyebrows. It was all coming together.

She looked again at the image and at herself.

Were they the same? She could've sworn her eyes weren't quite the same colour. Maybe it was the lighting. Her nose looked smaller there, too.

Surely it was the camera angle. Couldn't be anything else, right?

What if her face had changed in those years? Did she look two years younger? Was this doomed to happen forever now? Was she always going to look like she was 24?

"N-no. That's not-" she muttered. "That can't be how it is now."

Had she been doing this subconsciously the entire time? What did Irida at 26 look like?

Her hands drifted to her face. Oh god. Oh fuck. She needed to stop. She needed someone else to help. She couldn't trust herself anymore. She needed to ask someone if they remembered what she looked like before these missions.

She needed someone to tell her what she looked like. She was a joke. This fucking mirror was making fun of her.

She looked away from the damn thing, realizing that she'd been panicking. She took a deep breath as her heartbeat slowed down. She sat on the edge of her bed before collapsing onto the unforgiving mattress.

This was okay. It'd all be okay.

Val would fix it.

She always fixed things.

---

## Chapter 2

The warm sunlight filtering through the curtains woke Irida. God knows what time it was. She said she'd meet with Val at some point today. It'd be rude to keep her waiting any longer. She was already being unprofessional as it was, leaving the mission early and letting Lucien deliver the cargo.

After taking a shower, she looked in the mirror. Her naked body glistened in the sunlight. It didn't feel wrong. But she didn't loiter. The longer she stared, the worse she'd feel.

It'd been so long since she'd been able to dress herself. It almost took a minute for her to decide. She settled on a blazer and red flared pants, accompanying the ensemble with a low cut blouse beneath the blazer, an elaborate gold necklace and wedges.

She stepped out onto the bustling street. Navara in the morning was not the same place as it was at night. The streets were filled with families and couples, each walking around and perusing vendor wares.

Children played around with fake swords and guns in parks, while their parents sat on benches and chatted with each other. The Virezza District was always like this. Beautiful beyond belief at the right time of day.

Two little girls, clearly twins, bumped into her.

"Oh! Sorry, miss!" One of them said, in a squeaky, high-pitched voice. "Come on! We need to get to the magician! Mommy's waiting!" The girl hurriedly muttered to her sister as the two shuffled past Irida.

Magicians? A novel concept in places without mage presence, sure, but... Navara wasn't one of those places. The civilian population couldn't use magic, but they were aware of it as a concept.

Those two kids seemed interested, though. The childlike wonder in their eyes couldn't be mistaken. She wasn't sure why she was thinking so hard about this. So what if a kid's show was going on? She had places to be.

She found herself walking in the same direction as the twins.

Well. If she were late, what harm would thirty more minutes do?

She rounded a corner of a cobblestone street, and at the end of it was a small crowd, all of them gathered together to watch a man do 'magic'. Irida slipped through, standing close to the front as she got a better look at him.

He definitely looked the part. His brown, wavy hair was messy, yet not to the point of looking unkempt. There was a style to it. He looked less like he'd just rolled out of bed and more like he was an impish trickster. His skin was dark. A shade darker than the olive skin she was so used to seeing in Navara.

That, coupled with his inquisitive orange eyes and studded earrings, made him unique among the residents. Clearly, he wasn't from here. His clothes pushed that point home further. He wore bright white trousers coupled with a black shirt. He wore a gray waistcoat over the shirt with ethnic designs. His hands were encased in similarly ivory gloves.

"Wow! What a crowd!" He exclaimed. "Alright, for my first trick, I'll take this piece of chalk and draw something on the ground. Any suggestions?"

"A dog!"

"A bird!"

"A butterfly!"

"My dad!"

He chuckled. "A butterfly sounds good. Now let's see here."

He squatted down, drawing crude butterflies on the cobblestone. They didn't look particularly impressive to Irida. "Alright, everyone. I need you all to count to three. Everyone needs to do it. If not, then nothing's gonna happen. But if you all do, then something magical will happen!"

"ONE!"

"TWO!"

"THREE!"

The man snapped as the butterflies took a form of their own, forming into glittering light and fluttering into the air. The crowd erupted in 'oohs' and 'aahs'. Irida squinted. He seemed like a mage. So what was he doing playing a magician?

"For my next trick, I'd like a volunteer. You there! Small girl! Come on up!"

The little girl from earlier walked up to him. He kneeled down to her and snapped, creating a small orb of light. "This is yours, alright? I want you to throw it as hard as you can."

"O-Okay!"

She threw the orb into the sky. It stopped a few feet above them.

"Hm. That's odd. It should pop." he said, sighing dramatically. He walked up to the yellow orb and flicked it, as it exploded into a harmless burst of glitter. The girl giggled and clapped.

Irida watched the rest of his performance in silence. He drew shapes in the air with his glittery light magic. He handed out 'fireflies in bottles', which were just glass bottles with a bunch of multicoloured sparks in them.

She crossed her arms, unimpressed. All that was left now was him charging the idiots in the audience for whatever he was trying to peddle. Sure, magic this flashy was rare even in the wider world, but seriously?

*That's all it took?*

Civvies were stupid.

"You, with the golden eyes! You're up next!"

He pointed at her. She blinked.

"What?"

"You're up next! For my ultimate trick, of course," he beamed. "Come on up!"

Irida looked around. Why was she the only adult chosen? Not that there were many adults in the crowd outside of parents handling their kids, but even still. She didn't even want to attend this damn thing initially!

She could just say no and move on, but-

Hey wait, she was already in front of him.

Fuck.

He grinned. "Are you ready?"

"Ready for what? You picked the wrong person." She muttered to him. "Last I checked, I'm not a kid who believes your act."

"On the contrary, golden-eyes-"

"Irida."

"On the contrary, Irida! I chose you *because* you looked disinterested. Can't have anyone feeling bored during one of my shows, after all."

"How cute. Just get it over with then, I suppose." she sighed. So long as he didn't humiliate her in front of this crowd, she could bear it.

"I just need you to stand still for a second. Gonna be borrowing this~" he reached for her necklace.

She caught his arm. "Ask first."

He chuckled, his gloved hand tightly in her grasp. "Oh, you're strong! Alright then. May I borrow your necklace, fair maiden? I promise I'll give it back."

Irida rolled her eyes. "Go on."

She detached it and handed it to him, as he held it in front of the audience. "Nice necklace, right? Now watch closely. I'm about to show off my biggest trick yet!"

He took the golden chain and played with it in his hands, before causing it to spark and jitter. Irida's eyes widened.

"Wait, what're you-!"

"BOOM!" he launched the sparking chain into the air, before it then exploded in a brilliant golden firework in the shape of a heart.

Her necklace. This bastard just blew up her necklace. The first thing she'd ever bought with her own money.

The crowd roared in applause, a high-pitched drone echoing through Irida's ears as she glared at the mage. She was about to beat the shit out of him in front of everyone before he put a hand up to stop the applause.

He opened his other hand, and from his fingers dangled a familiar golden chain.

"Ta da!" More loud cheers of excitement, accompanied with applause. He bowed as people threw money at him. "Please, please. No donations! I just wish to entertain! Thank you all for attending!"

The crowd slowly dispersed, as Irida stayed back, waiting for her chain to be returned. He eventually turned to her. "Thank you for participating. You did a great job."

She took the necklace back, hooking it around her neck again. "I was about to lose it when you blew it up. I suppose I fell for the trick, didn't I?" She chuckled lightly.

"Yep!" he laughed. "All part of the show. Do you wish to know how I did it?"

She looked at him. Why did he look so... familiar? She'd seen his face somewhere. She just couldn't figure out where.

"No, you're a mage, obviously. I know that much."

"No mage could've done that trick, to my knowledge. C'mon. You've gotta admit that I've got skills as a magician!"

Irida crossed her arms, her hips cocked as she gave him an unimpressed look. "You didn't ask for money either. Is this a practice gig? Are you doing this for fun?"

"What's life without a little fun, eh?" he smirked, shrugging.

"You're clearly not from Navara. Never seen you around these parts." she said, hiding the fact that the Belladonna had a dossier on every mage in the city. This man was someone she'd never seen on that list.

"I'm visiting. Technically, I'm on a work trip. But work gets really boring sometimes, right? I'm sure anyone can relate."

"I..." she sighed. "Well, I can't say I don't relate. Work has been... rough."

"All the more reason to unwind, right?" he remarked. "I could tell. Whatever you're wound up about doesn't matter. Life's too short to sweat the small stuff."

"I wouldn't call it small." she scoffed.

"You should! The smaller the better!" he exclaimed.

She snorted. Dammit.

He picked up on it, before snickering to himself. "Okay, wait. I phrased that wrong."

"Well, my fault for laughing. Not feeling myself today." She muttered.

He trailed off, looking into the distance. "Hope you feel better. Did my show help?"

"... Yes. I guess it did. Thank you."

"Irida, right?" he said. "I'm Soren. Nice to meet ya."

He offered a hand out to shake. She saw no harm in doing so. Soren? Something gnawed at the back of her mind. Where had she heard that name before? It wasn't Navaran, she knew that much.

She took his hand and shook it. "See you around, okay?"

He gave her a thumbs up, as he gathered his things. She walked away.

She'd put this off long enough. Time to head to work.

---

Nighttime was when Palazzo Belladonna was intended to truly stand out. It still looked pretty under the afternoon sun, of course. It sat along the riverbank, the still, clear waters of Navara river almost glowing as they reflected the sunlight.

The building itself was a breathtaking ivory, lined with tall arched windows framed in gold-trimmed ironwork. This was an old building, one that traced back to the humble beginnings of the city she called home. She had memories of it back from when she was a child. It looked the same then. Timeless, elegant, and beautiful.

Balconies protruded out the building's facade, hanging over the river like delicate claws. There was no grand entrance. The Palazzo was open at all times, with multiple entrances. Be it from the river, or from the pavement.

The Palazzo was a convention center. A club. Walking inside gave off that expression perfectly. Smooth marbled flooring, intricate pillars stretching up to the high ceiling and luxurious red drapery hung around the rooms, a brilliant splash of colour in the pure white space. Lanterns hung at every window, lighting up when the sun disappeared to give the place a nice, amber glow.

As much as she could gush about the place, this wasn't where her work was conducted. No, that was in the lower level. The place no one but the family got to see. She was allowed downstairs, the guards parting to allow her passage into the actual heart of Palazzo Belladonna.

Underneath the nightclub was a network of rooms and corridors, each with its own specific function and purpose. Some members of the House lived down here. The more important members, or the ones who had nowhere else to go.

People recognized her. Hushed whispers about 'The Mirror' filled the hallways as she walked by the huge number of people who were considered her family. That term itself meant little to her, biological or not. Her family had let her down enough times.

No one had pointed out her face. Either they simply didn't notice, or she truly was the same.

Val would know. She'd make it clear.

She made it to the opulent room where the matriarch of House Belladonna usually resided, only to find the dais empty. She wasn't here. The person who was there, though, made her tense up.

Lucien smirked at her, his dark sclerae making his vermilion eyes look all the more intimidating. He wore the same crappy clothes, looking her up and down as if she were his junior. "You're late."

"I was tired. From actually being the one doing all the work last night. I'm sure you slept wonderfully, though." She put her hand on her hip.

"Oh, brilliantly. Especially after completing the mission that you were too useless to finish. Hope your ribs still aren't broken."

"They're good enough for me to beat your ass. If you lied to Val, I swear to god, I'll make sure a lot more than your ribs break."

He sneered at her. "Either you think I'm an idiot for choosing to lie to the boss, or you think the boss is an idiot for falling for any lie I could come up with. Which is it, Mirror?"

"You know the answer to that one. Only an idiot would turn his eyes black so he could look scarier. You'd scare some losers from the Red Vipers, maybe. That's about it."

"Pshh. This mug ain't changing, unlike yours. You're only ever of use to us when you're not Irida, so transform into whichever whore is needed quickly so I don't need to look at you anymore."

"Scared of someone that looks hot *and* intimidating? Boxes you fill neither of?"

"Maybe if you changed your face enough times you'd come up with one that actually looked hot. Right now you look like a rat. If I had your magic, I'd make myself look even better than I usually do. Meanwhile, you look even uglier than usual."

She flinched. That was just a casual insult. Childish nonsense that meant nothing. Of all people, she was *not* falling for Lucien's bait. She refused to let him get to her.

*'You look even uglier than usual.'*

"Shut up." She snapped.

He raised an eyebrow and smirked. "Did I hit a nerve?"

"Your face is the only thing that's going to be hit if you don't shut your damn mouth."

"You're scared, aren't you? Scared that you don't look quite the same as you used to." he sneered.  
"Well, not like you're losing much. I'd just give up and make myself a new face if I were you. One that doesn't look like a pathetic bitch."

"Lucien, if you don't shut up now, I'll-!"

The grand double doors behind them creaked open, interrupting their argument. Both Irida and Lucien straightened up, their bickering forgotten as the matriarch of House Belladonna was here.

Valentia Belladonna was a woman who was probably close to a hundred years of age, and yet she looked only the slightest bit older than Irida herself. The Belladonna family, the *true* family, was gifted with a magical trait. Incredibly long lives. Valentia's mother died at 347, far longer than any human could reasonably live.

Valentia was here when Irida's mother was born, and she'd be here when Irida's children had long passed. A constant.

In a way, that was reflected in her appearance. Val didn't walk in, she was moved in. The Belladonna family's matriarch weighed more than six people combined. She was an enormous woman, one whose mobility had long since left her, though it was clearly by choice than anything.

Her enormous chest was but a footnote to her absolutely massive belly, which extended far enough to obscure her legs, sitting between them. Her rear was equally large, settled into the backrest of her ornate bed, on which she was more or less confined. Her legs, while thick, were no longer capable of movement, a sharp contrast to her slender arms. Despite her figure, her arms were as dainty as ever. She held a hand fan in one of them, elegantly waving it in the clutch of her long red nails.

She was beautiful. Her face was perfectly pristine at all times, a small mole under her lip being the only imperfection, if one could even call it that. Her long black hair was tied into a high ponytail, twin bangs framing her face. Her red eyes glittered with warmth. Her face was slim and elegant. Irida could never quite get used to seeing Val. She was a presence unique in the world.

Valentia maintained her authority and poise, draped in the most premium of black and red fabrics. They covered her lower half pretty well, though she left a lot of her chest and stomach out in the open: a bold show of confidence.

Jewelry adorned her form: a chain of golden beads fitted around her stomach and below her chest. Her long fingers were adorned in rings, around her neck was an exquisite gold chain, and even her navel had been pierced with gold.

Irida had never once seen Valentia as abnormal. Far from it, despite what all the others said about her. Val saved her. She's the woman Irida wishes she could be, if not in capability, then in physical confidence.

Her men pushed her bed towards the center of the room, a laborious process, even for the musclebound guards. She acknowledged both Irida and Lucien as they bowed.

"Irida. You finally arrived. May I know the reason for your tardiness?"

Irida gulped. "I, er... Yesterday was an arduous night for me, milady. I overslept. Please forgive my transgressions."

"There's nothing to forgive." Valentia's smooth, silky voice settled over Irida like a balm. "Lucien told me about your injury. It's not unnatural that the ointment caused drowsiness. I simply wanted confirmation."

"Thank you, milady." Irida bowed deeply.

Val's gaze moved to Lucien, as he visibly sweated. "And you, Lucien? May I know the reason for your presence here?"

"I'm simply here to report the status of the Nullstone, Lady Belladonna. They've fully extracted the dust from the shipment and are now running tests on it."

"What of the damage to the container?"

"Some of the Nullstone dust might have leaked out of the opening, but no substantial amount was lost."

Valentia's placid expression didn't change, but she did let out a soft sigh. "I see. If that is all, you may leave, Lucien."

He nodded and rose, shooting Irida a look before exiting the Matriarch's den. Valentia's gaze fell back onto Irida. "You two were fighting again?"

"Nothing to be concerned about, milady. He... got under my skin. That is all. It won't happen again."

"Got under your skin? That is new. I always thought of you as someone who kept her emotions in check." Val stated.

"I am. I just... Can we talk?" Irida looked up at Val. To everyone, she was the Matriarch. But to Irida, she was also the closest thing she had to someone she could speak to. Someone she could trust. She wasn't Lady Belladonna. She was Val.

"Of course." Valentia smiled. A small, barely noticeable one, but a smile, nonetheless. "What is bothering you? Come closer."

Irida gingerly stepped closer to the enormous woman's dais. Even seated, Val was so enormous that she could look Irida in the eyes. "It's been some time since I last assumed my true form. Last night when I was trying to shift back, I..."

Irida trailed off, the memories of last night flooding back to her unbidden. She blinked away tears. No, she would not cry over this. She refused to.

"I forgot my face," she said, her voice cracking slightly. "I... I needed a reference picture to recreate it."

Val nodded. "I see. You're worried that it could be a problem down the line?"

"Not a problem, per se. It's just... New. That's never happened to me before. I thought I could remember what I looked like. It should be natural. How could I forget? I don't know if it's because of the time or whether I'm getting too deep into my roles or... something else."

Valentia hummed. "Irida. That is an understandable reason to panic, but you needn't worry so much. Your identity is preserved, even through the longest missions. That's all that matters. Needing a reference image is common for shapeshifters, even when going back to their true selves."

"Really?"

"Your mother always used one." Val noted. "It's perfectly normal. Even for your unique role, it is nothing to worry about."

"O-Okay. But even after I used the image, I..." she looked down, clenching the ends of her blazer. "I'm not sure if I look the way I should, or-"

Valentia's sharp fingernail went under her chin, pulling Irida's gaze back up to meet hers. Her gaze was as it always was. Soft, composed, and intelligent. She looked at Irida closely. "You look the same, Irida. As pretty as ever."

Irida's expression brightened slightly, though her voice still wavered. "You think so?"

"I know so." Valentia said, letting go of Irida before leaning back into her seated position with a soft sigh, as if reaching forward to touch Irida took effort. "Now. We have more pressing matters to discuss."

"Yes. T-Thank you, Val." Irida responded. She hesitated slightly before smiling.

The woman simply nodded. "I have another mission for you. A short-term one, but a major one regardless. I will give you more details in the coming days, but this is a preliminary briefing."

"Of course, milady."

"Soren Dev is in Navara."

Soren. Soren Dev.

Shit. That was his name. The magician. That was who he was! How couldn't she have known?

"The Firewalker," she muttered, as the pieces clicked into place. "He's here."

"Indeed. The strongest mage alive has arrived in Navara. His motives are unknown, of course. We're currently undergoing negotiations to gauge him, but his mere presence disrupts the balance I've worked so hard to maintain."

Irida nodded. "Understood."

"This isn't a request as yet, but if circumstances necessitate it, you shall be dispatched. Your job will be to seduce him. Get him vulnerable and strike when he least expects it. A simple mission, and one only someone like you can pull off, Irida."

"Affirmative," she nodded, the image of the magician flickering through her mind. He was kind.

"I will prepare a list of identities you may assume to pursue this task." Val noted. "Though-

"Um, excuse me, milady. I... have a request."

"Go on."

"I... met the target today, once already. He was masquerading as a street performer. I spoke with and interacted with him. Chances are that he finds me endearing."

Val nodded. "I see. Very intriguing. So then. What is your request?"

"Let me seduce him as me. As Irida Belladonna. I can change my name if necessary. He doesn't know my surname. But he knows me. I've already talked to him with no agenda in mind. Regardless of how smart he is..."

"...No one would find you suspicious, because you truly had no ulterior motives." Val finished the sentence. "Quite pragmatic of you, Irida. Perhaps fate has blessed us today."

"Is that...?"

"An affirmative?" Valentia went quiet for a few seconds. "Alright. I shall decide to rely on your intuition, Irida. I will inform you of more details in the coming days. You are dismissed."

Irida nodded, bowing slightly before walking out. She was free. Free of having to use her damn powers again, at least for now.

She was Irida. She was going to be Irida for a couple of weeks at least.

Thank god.

---

## Chapter 3

The following days were uneventful. In Irida's life, that was usually a good thing. No new mission, no new life-or-death scenario. Just...

Life.

She had a litany of ideas on what to do to pass the time. She considered going fishing. Maybe even just taking in the city sights. Her house was so large, yet so empty. She considered buying things to fill it.

She ended up trying to finish the book Val had so generously lent her. She was on chapter five the last time she checked.

She'd often go scout out Soren's magic shows, observing from a nearby rooftop. He didn't need to see her right now, especially not when she had no plan in mind for him.

She was getting distracted.

...

It would be prudent to deepen their relationship, but he was the Firewalker. If there were even a chance that he suspected her motives were off, the entire plan would be in jeopardy before Val even gave her the mission.

She was getting distracted.

...

"Tch." she looked up at her window. Her leg twitched.

...

She found herself in the Palazzo training halls. The book could wait.

She punched a sandbag in the dingy hall repeatedly, trying multiple variations of strikes and attack patterns. As she knocked it over, she heard the familiar footsteps of the man she so thoroughly despised.

"What?" she asked coldly.

"Y'know, I've always wondered. Why bother with all this crap when you can just shapeshift muscles onto yourself?" Lucien walked up behind her.

"Stick to figuring out how to use your own magic, dumbass." Irida turned to look at him. "You clearly have no idea how mine works."

"Oof. That time of the month, huh? Or are you just that pissy about yesterday?"

"You act like I took offense at what you said." Irida smirked, walking up to him.

"Clearly, you did. Fitting, isn't it? The girl who can take on any face forgot what her own looks like."

Irida crossed her arms. "I'm flattered that you pay so much attention to my face that you can notice the differences, Lucien. Can I rely on you to help me with it from now on?" she teased.

Lucien's eyebrows furrowed, annoyed that his potshots were no longer working. "The last person whose face I want to look at is yours, you smug bitch."

"Smug for a reason. Anyway, are you here to whine, or do you actually have something to tell me?"

Lucien's fist clenched, but he knew better than to attack her. He may have had more destructive magic, but Irida would make quick work of him if he tried to swing at her. "The boss wants to see you."

"Good. Seems she has a plan." Irida brushed past him.

"Lucky whore." he spat.

The days since her meeting with Val had gone by smoothly. She couldn't believe she was panicking so much about her face. It was okay. Everything was okay.

As pretty as ever. Heh.

She pushed the door leading into Val's room, as she walked up to the enormous woman, who was busy reading a book. Irida bowed.

"Milady."

Val's gaze lifted from the old, leather-bound book she was looking through and turned to her. "Irida. I take it you've been well?"

"Much better, milady. All thanks to you."

Valentia hummed. "I have your dossier ready."

One of Valentia's men handed Irida a file, likely about Soren Dev. Irida opened it, seeing information about his origins, his abilities, and his plausible reasons for coming to Navara.

"As you can see, there isn't much about the man. Wherever he's from was secretive about his life until adulthood. The man himself seems to make up stories about his upbringing near constantly." Valentia explained.

"To be expected with someone with his power."

"What we do know is that he's been working in the East for quite some time now. This is his first time coming over to the West. Based on his interactions with the government, he's not here of his own accord."

"He told me this was a 'work trip' when I met him that day. He said it was 'boring'." Irida noted.

"Possible. He works directly under the Mage Association. It's possible that they sent him here to 'clean up' Navara."

Irida's eyes widened slightly. "Clean up? What does that mean?"

"The Red Vipers are one issue. They're the most obvious troublemakers. If he's here to wipe them out, it would be one thing. But his interactions with the government give me the idea that he's wary of them as well."

"Do you think..."

"It's incredibly likely he knows about us. And if he sets his sights on the House, and furthermore if he succeeds, this city will fall." Valentia said, adjusting her enormous form on the bed slightly, as if the mere thought made her uncomfortable.

The Belladonna family was the oldest in the city. They *were* Navara. Without them, people like Dorien would be making key decisions. The beautiful society in which Irida had grown up would die. She couldn't let that happen.

"I'm to kill him before that happens?"

Valentia's lips slowly curved into a smile. "Perhaps. And... perhaps not."

Irida tilted her head.

Valentia reached into her sleeve, and pulled out a vial. "Do you know what this is?"

"A potion?"

"It is. But it's a lot more than just that. This is a potion made from Eternite. It's rather famous in the black market as a magic strengthener. Anyone who drinks this can turn their magical abilities into ones that could flatten cities."

"I see."

"It's a powerful weapon. But for the longest time, people wished for the opposite. Rather than something that increased magic power, what about something that decreased it? Made any mage's abilities completely useless?"

"The Nullstone."

"Indeed. The Nullstone, in truth, is made of Eternite dust as well. The only difference is that someone meddled with the substance's properties, perhaps using alchemy to make it achieve the opposite of its intended effect." Valentia said, shifting the vial between her fingers.

She turned to look at Irida. "All that's to say, we're now the only people in Navara with access to Nullstone. Ergo, we're the only people who, rather than kill Soren, can use him."

"Use him? As a weapon?"

"Indeed. We're developing Nullstone chains that can render his magic powerless. That would allow us to do whatever we wished. Sway him onto our side, and bring the Firewalker into our family."

"Do you think that would be possible?" Irida asked.

"Anything is possible, dear. I'm aware I've made your mission that much more difficult. All you need to do is render him unconscious and bring him back to the Palazzo. We shall handle the rest." Valentia explained, slipping the vial back into her sleeve.

"Understood. Am I authorized to kill him if there's no other choice?"

Valentia's gaze hardened ever so slightly. "If there truly is no other choice, yes. But it would be a massive loss if he were killed. Be it by you, or anyone else."

"Affirmative," Irida bowed her head. "I shall do my best, milady."

Valentia smiled. "Of course you will, Irida. And you're sure you wish to stay as you are?"

Irida nodded. "Yes. I believe my rapport with him will give me a better chance to seduce him than as anyone else."

"You needn't become anyone else, Irida. But sincerity and optimization are not mutually exclusive. If a touch more softness is required to get him further under your spell, I trust you to know where to place it." Valentia purred.

Irida looked at Val, her eyes widening a little. What did that mean?

"Yes, milady. Of course." She nodded. "Is that all?"

"Of course. You can leave."

---

Finding Soren was no issue. Irida had caught so many of his performances at this point that she even knew most of his repertoire. She decided to actually join the crowd this time. She had the entire script ready.

He finished his show with the same trick he always ended his shows with, as the crowd slowly dispersed. Irida remained, clapping as she walked up to him. "I thought the magic would be lost after seeing your show the first time. I'm happy to see that it isn't the case."

Soren noticed her, his expression brightening. "Irida! Haven't heard from you in a bit. What made you decide to actually have a chat this time?"

"Huh?"

"Oh, c'moon. Don't think I didn't notice you watching from the roof for the last couple of days."

Oh.

**Oh no.**

"I um..."

How had this happened? How had she lost control of the conversation this quickly?! This was not supposed to happen. He wasn't supposed to see her.

"It's fine. I get it, someone's a little shy."

What.

"I-I'm not shy!"

"You sound so shy right now."

"How do you even sound shy?!"

"You just do. I don't know what to tell ya."

What mind games was he playing?

"Ugh," she put a hand on her hip averting her gaze. "I'm so embarrassed right now. I was watching you for so long, trying to just... I don't know. Understand you, or something."

"Understand me?"

"Listen, I..." she sighed. "I really appreciated what you did for me that day. You brightened my day when I was feeling really down. So I really wanted to pay you back. I just didn't know how."

His expression twisted into a sickly sweet grin. "That's so sweet. You were trying to muster up the courage to thank me?"

"Y-yeah. In a sense. I wanted to do something for you. I'm not a mage like you, so I can't show you anything interesting. You told me you were new to Navara, right?" she asked.

"Yeah, I am. It's a nice place, though. Real cute tile work."

"Tile work?"

"Yeah. Tiles look gorgeous. The tiles on the roofs, tiles on the floors, I've seen some tiles in the walls too."

"Right," she cleared her throat. "Have you been able to explore the city?"

He rubbed the back of his head. "Man, I wish. Been absorbed in this gig and also getting pestered by work stuff. I am free tomorrow, though. We can go out."

"You are? Okay, so um, do you mind going out on a- wait. What did you say?"

"We can go out tomorrow. Together. If you'll have me." Soren smirked. "That was what you were gonna say, right?"

"Well, yeah, but..." she trailed off. "You barely know me. You're okay with going out with me alone, just like that?"

"Yep."

"We've only talked once before this."

"I know."

"You caught me stalking you from the rooftops."

"It was cute."

Irida felt like jumping off one of those aforementioned rooftops. What was going on?! This was so *wrong*. He'd called her out on stalking him, brushed it aside like she was a weird fangirl, and now was just okay going out on a date with her? Someone as powerful as him had no reservations about a random woman asking to go out?

Was he that confident or that stupid? She could knock him out right now. All she'd need to do was sweep his legs out and put him in a chokehold.

He didn't have a hint of any defensive posture. She was a fighter. She knew how people looked when they relaxed. Be it a mage or not, if someone was expecting trouble, they always had this tightness about them.

But he was the opposite. So utterly and completely loose that it kind of insulted her. How dare he not see her as a threat?

She realized she was spacing out, sighing softly. "I just never thought it'd be so simple."

"I like when things are simple." Soren mused, his orange eyes narrowing. "Like, why bother going through all the complexities of life? We won't be here forever. I'm here for a good time, not a long time, am I right? Reminds me of a time when..."

As he rambled on, however, Irida noticed someone in the shadows. The familiar silver hair made it clear who it was. Séverine Kade.

She stood in an alleyway, a short distance away, where Soren couldn't see her. Regardless of how perceptive he was, there was no way he was going to notice the Marrow Syndicate's prized assassin aiming a pistol at him.

Irida didn't have time to figure out the optics of the situation. She had to act.

She stepped forward, tripping over her own feet.

"Whoa!" she yelped, falling right into Soren's arms. She used her body to move him out of the way, but he was a lot stronger than she'd expected. Rather than pushing him away, she could only get him to swerve, shifting her own position around.

She didn't hear the gunshot, but she sure as hell felt it. It was a sharp, stabbing pain in her arm.

Shit.

This was fine. It was just the arm. Even if she'd been shot there, she could get it repaired.

However, the pain subsided almost immediately. She looked down at her arm. Was that a dart? She quickly pulled it out before Soren could notice. She watched Séverine disappear back into the alleyway. She had to pray Soren could handle himself in the meantime.

Soren looked down at her with a shit-eating grin. "Be careful on your feet there. It'd be a shame if you messed up that tunic."

"S-Sorry. And... thank you," she managed, extricating herself from him. "I owe you again."

"Pssh. Don't mention it. I don't do favours." Soren waved her off. "I'm just surprised you didn't lash out when I grabbed you."

"Do women usually push you away?" Irida raised an eyebrow.

"Not really." Soren rubbed his chin. "You're the type who doesn't like being touched, right?"

"What?"

"Back then. You slapped away my hand," he noted. "Gave me the feeling you're not the biggest fan of being touched, even if it's harmless."

"You were trying to touch my neck. Anyone would feel uncomfortable." Irida crossed her arms.

"I'm... surprised you remembered that."

"Why wouldn't I?" he tilted his head innocently. "It's been a few days, but it's not like I'd forget you."

She went quiet for a beat. "You're right. Um... If you're still sure about all this, then meet me at San Aurelio at half-past one tomorrow."

"Absolutely. I'm looking forward to it, Irida." he smiled. "Oh! I forgot."

"Hm?"

He reached into his bag, fishing out a small bottle with a cork. Inside were small lights. His 'fireflies in a bottle' trick.

"Here. I didn't give you one last time, but I give everyone who attends my show one of these." he smiled.

"These lights are magic, right? What if I break the glass?" she asked curiously.

"Eh, you won't. That isn't just any ordinary glass. It's from my homeland. Tougher than most metals. Try not to open the cork though, they'll fly out," he advised. "My magic likes to return to me if it's out for too long, so definitely don't open it now."

"Right," she said, looking at the multicoloured orbs of light bouncing around inside. "Thank you, Soren."

"No problem." he waved.

"Take care of yourself." She muttered as she walked away, putting the bottle into her bag. "This place gets a little dangerous at night."

He chuckled. "Hah. She's so worried."

She clutched the tiny prick on her arm. It didn't feel numb yet. There was no fast-acting poison.

She looked at the dart. What the hell had Séverine shot her with? As badly as she wanted to shadow Soren and make sure he wasn't attacked, she had to get this looked at.

Not to mention, if he saw her again, she was done for.

---

Much to Irida's annoyance, the doctor's answer was inconclusive. There was no poison. But there was a foreign substance they couldn't identify. All she got was a 'you should be okay'. She didn't have time to worry about these edge cases, anyway. She had a job to do.

She got next to no sleep that night, too busy shifting and turning under her covers, wondering if someone had already beat her to the punch and killed that mage already. No. No one would do that. Not while the Belladonna were watching.

The day was here.

Getting dressed to knock him off his feet was a novel experience for her. She was too used to wearing other people's fashion. She wasn't used to dressing herself.

Her ensemble this time around was a luxurious, yet functional outfit. A stunning black and gold piece she saved for special occasions. The bodice was tight around her waist, the ornate golden embroidery forming beautiful patterns on the black fabric.

The neckline was plunging, revealing a lot of her chest. It might've been too much, but she couldn't take any chances. Her necklace matched a gold choker with filigrees, bringing out her aureate eyes. The dress had short white sleeves, flared around her biceps. A small capelet hung off her back, mostly to hide the bag she was carrying her throwing knives in.

Waist down, the dress turned into a short skirt, showing off her thighs, though an overskirt draped down her back. A hint of burgundy on the inner side brought out her legs, which themselves were encased in thigh-high boots.

She completed the look with short arm warmers and loose bangles, which she was sure would fall off at the slightest action.

As she put in her crescent-shaped earrings, she couldn't help but stop to take everything in. This was her. Irida Belladonna.

She looked pretty. But...

Was that enough?

*"If a touch more softness is required to get him further under your spell, I trust you to know where to place it."*

Valentia's words ran through her head. She felt like kicking herself for not asking her to elucidate, but did she want to hear the answer? Did she want to hear about the possibility that she was delusional about her own sex appeal?

A touch of softness...

Her eyes drifted to her breasts. Perhaps they could be slightly bigger. Soren wouldn't notice.

She tried it. Her body shuddered, a sense of discomfort spreading from the wound on her arm.

What the hell was that?

She looked at her chest. It was slightly bigger. Here she was. Giving herself an upsize to make herself look more appealing.

Something only a slut would do.

It was fine. She didn't want to get too much bigger. Playing with the size of her bust had major consequences if she went too far. If there was one thing her mother was useful for, it was telling her about such disgusting tidbits.

She took a deep breath.

Everything would be okay.

---

## Chapter 4

Irida was surprised to see Soren waiting for her before she even got to San Aurelio. Sure, she'd almost forgotten to pack her weapons and hastily needed to shove them into her bag, but she wasn't late.

He was just early.

"Irida! You look amazing!" he walked up to her. "Wow, where'd you get that dress?"

"I'm showing you around town today, aren't I? I'll show you the place when we get there." She put on a smile, blushing as earnestly as she could. "You look handsome too, by the way."

"Well, y'know. I do my best." he said bashfully. Truth be told, he didn't look too different from the usual. His bright ivory pants still shone in the afternoon sun, but now his entire outfit was a bright white that made her eyes hurt.

Gone was the black shirt. In was a sleeved pearl shirt with ethnic designs and an odd-looking collar. His waistcoat had been traded out for a more informal grey vest. His sleeves were rolled up a little, probably to deal with the heat.

What caught her eye the most, however, was a bright red sash he wore loosely draped around him, with golden patterns in the fabric. It was loosely tied around his waist.

"Shall we get going?" she asked.

"After you," he bowed.

They walked through the sunlight-drenched pathways of the city, as Irida felt a strong hint of nostalgia. It wasn't often she got to experience Navara as a pedestrian.

"This is the town square. Probably the busiest part of the city. Try not to get lost," she said.

"Oh yeah. Always wanted to come here." Soren looked around. "Lotta stalls."

"They change every day. Some days, no one sells anything. Others, this place is so packed that there's no space for people to even queue up. There used to be a stall I really-"

"Whoa, is that one selling candied apples?!"

"Huh?"

Irida barely caught Soren's back as he disappeared into the crowd. "Dammit. Soren!"

She had to shove past a few people to get to him, standing in-line for the apple slices like an excited child. As she pushed through the crowd, however, she noticed a man sneaking up on him, slowly drawing a knife. She surged forward.

"Next time, please tell me if you're going somewhere. It's hard to keep track of you." Irida scoffed, walking up to him.

"Sorry!" he said, popping one of the candied slices into his mouth. "Want shum?"

"No thanks." She said.

"Whoa, is that guy okay?" Soren pointed his toothpick at a man on the street in a fetal position.

"Just drunk, probably." She waved it off.

He was not drunk. He was dead.

Irida made sure to kill him with his own knife.

"Did you eat lunch yet?" Irida asked.

"Does it look like I did?" he asked, popping another slice into his mouth. "Why, you're gonna treat me?"

"Do women usually pay on first dates where you're from?"

"They do if the guy's really cute," he said, adjusting his hair. "Don't think I forgot about you falling into my arms yesterday."

"I tripped."

"Into my arms," he said, an annoyingly smug look on his face. She wanted to punch the taste out of his mouth so badly. But not yet. Not while she was sure he could retaliate.

The path from the main plaza to the restaurant she had in mind was a lot longer than she remembered. Some roads were closed down due to 'renovations'. Others were far too shady for her to risk going through.

Somehow, they ended up stumbling across a gaggle of street musicians. Traditional Navaran music.

The exact tune was one she'd heard before many times. A classic in the city. One she'd grown up hearing.

Her mother would often hum it.

"You okay?" he asked.

"Hm? Oh, no, I'm fine."

"They're playing pretty well, aren't they? Catchy song, too," he murmured. "C'mon, let's go see."

As much as she wanted to tell him no, she didn't protest him dragging her along by the arm.

They walked up to the crowd, as they swayed to the music, the lead singer of the band belting out the chorus as the audience clapped.

"What's she saying?" Soren asked over the music.

"Who transcribes music? Just listen and enjoy!" Irida yelled back.

He bobbed his head, his body swaying to the beat. She paled as he slowly started dancing. A few members of the crowd were already up front, dancing together.

"No, no, no!"

Soren pulled her along by the hand as they shuffled to the front of the crowd. He twirled her into his arms, smiling. She blushed. "What are you doing?" she whisper-screamed.

"What does it look like?"

"I-I can't dance!"

"I gotcha," he smiled, as the two swayed to the rhythm of the music. He was strong. Far stronger than what she expected from a mage.

She twirled in his grip, gasping as he swayed along with her. He let go of her, breaking out into his own number, the crowd cheering.

His gaze met hers again, as she offered her hand. Soren took it and she followed him, the two synchronizing their movements. The music echoed in her ears, memories of a happier time lingering in her head.

That was until multiple burly men appeared from the crowd. Viper tattoos snaked all over their arms. Her chest suddenly felt tighter. How the hell was she going to manage this?

She took control of their choreography, swaying along with him as the crowd circled around them. They drifted near it, as Irida twisted him away, kicking one of the armed thugs in the crotch as he doubled over and fell backwards.

Another readied his knife as she forced him to dip her, avoiding the thrown weapon, which clattered harmlessly on the sidewalk. He prepared another, as Irida spun out of Soren's arms, grabbing the knife and throwing it into another man's gut, as he doubled over and fell.

Soren was none the wiser, an even bigger grin on his face as he was clearly enjoying this. "And she says she can't dance. I love the aggression!"

She smirked, leaning into his grip. She pulled back, discreetly elbowing the last assailant in the face. The song reached its crescendo, as Soren lifted her into the air and spun, a small gasp leaving her lips as she noticed a fourth Red Viper member pulling out a gun.

The crowd screamed at their performance, Irida reaching into her bag and throwing a knife at the man, who stumbled and fell over a rail and into the waters below.

The band's last note left their instruments as Soren placed her down, breathless and clearly enthused. He bowed, Irida copying the gesture, the crowd roaring for them.

They made their way back through their adoring fans, as Irida shot Soren a look. "Did you need to make a scene?"

"Why not enjoy a little spotlight?" he asked. "Besides, it's a song you liked."

"How do you know that?"

"It was clear from your face," he said, as if that was obvious. Here she was, making sure she didn't show a hint of expression, and he'd been able to tell how she felt that easily?

"My face?"

"Yeah. A person's eyes say a lot," he chuckled. "So, what's the story?"

Irida scoffed, fumbling with her dress. "It's... nothing interesting. The song's called Inno dell'anima. Hymn of the Soul. It's very popular here. My... mother used to sing it often."

"Ah." he nodded. "That's sweet."

"It's... yeah," she sighed, adjusting a strap on her dress. "I suppose."

"Never knew my mom. Or my dad," Soren said, looking up at the sky.

"You're not missing out on much." She muttered.

"Huh?"

"Nothing," she said. "It's just been a while. Since I've explored the place like this."

"Work's that busy, huh?"

"In a way."

"I feel ya. This is my first job in a while that's given me some freedom to just... take in the little things," he said, his voice a little wistful.

She sighed softly, adjusting her top. "I see."

"Is that dress fitting you alright?" he asked.

"Huh?"

"You've been picking at it a lot. I mean, I'm not a guy who ogles, but it's hard to miss after the first time." he noted.

She looked down. She had been picking at it unconsciously, but that was only because there was a vague... tightness. She thought it was anxiety.

But it didn't feel like it now that she thought about it. Did... did her breasts look bigger?

She'd definitely given them an upsize, but they weren't this large when she'd done it. Right?

It didn't matter. She could just turn back to normal. That's all. She just needed to force her body to return to how it was.

"Uh... Irida? Hello?"

It wasn't working. Why wasn't it working? What the hell was going on?

"Whuh? Oh. Right. Um... It's... it's nothing. I'm alright."

"You sure?"

"Dress is a little tight but I'll manage. Let's just get lunch."

As they walked, however, Irida felt her chest bouncing with every movement. The dress was secure enough for her not to need a bra, but it suddenly felt inadequate. Every step she took caused her breasts to jiggle. She wasn't conscious of it before, but she most definitely was now. Even worse, every step caused the dress to rub against her own body.

It would've been unproblematic, but now it was... stimulating.

"Um, where were we going again?" she asked.

He smirked. "Weren't you supposed to be the one telling me?"

"O-Oh. Right. Lunch. Haha."

FUCK.

---

Irida managed to get Soren yapping about his magic tricks long enough for her to take her mind off her chest and onto the restaurant they'd arrived at. They reserved a table and sat opposite each other.

Irida couldn't help but fiddle with the straps of her dress. She could've sworn it was even tighter now. Her breasts extended far enough to almost graze the edge of the table.

Did he notice? Surely he was noticing. Maybe he was just too kind to say anything about it.

Maybe.

"How's the ambiance?" She asked, trying to break the awkward silence.

"This place is really fancy." He noted. "I'm impressed."

"I'm no cheapskate." She scoffed. "I'll have you know my job earns me a lot."

"What *is* your job, anyway?" he asked.

"Government stuff. Nothing super interesting. Keeps me busy," she noted. "Your turn."

"Can't say I'm much different." He said, looking at his hands. "Telling people I'm a magician would be a lot cooler than what my actual job is. So I often tell them that."

"Have you ever wanted to leave?" she asked.

He perked up. "Leave what? My job?"

"Yeah. Can't you just quit?"

He chuckled before sighing. "No. I can't. I don't love what I do. I never made friends through it, or met loved ones. Just got more money than I knew what to do with," he sighed.

"What do you mean? Isn't that the purpose of jobs?" she asked.

He smiled. "You're not wrong. But isn't there a saying? If you do what you love, you'll love what you do? I love many things. I love magic. I love taking people's breaths away, giving them a show. Whenever I do those things, I love them. Whenever I do what I have to do, things get messy."

"What do you have to do?" she pushed further.

Soren smirked at her. "That's the question on everyone's minds right now, isn't it? What I have to do right now is to show my date a good time. Anything else is boring. Come on, we're young. We shouldn't be yapping about our jobs like some old geezers. I'm sure you've got a ton of hobbies outside whatever you do. Doesn't everyone?"

She rolled her eyes. "Not everyone is as irresponsible as you. Some of us have commitments."

"Who cares?" he scoffed. "What do *you* want to do? What makes *you* happy? That's all that matters."

"I..." she trailed off. It was only for a moment, a pang of vulnerability hitting her as she pushed it down just as quickly. "I enjoy reading."

He stuck a tongue out. "Boring."

"Shut up! It's an intellectual's hobby!"

"Are you secretly a fifty-year-old in disguise?" he teased.

"You're such a child." She crossed her arms, the motion suddenly feeling awkward as she felt the enormity of her bosom. Had it grown again?

"Where's our food, anyway? We ordered ten minutes ago." Soren noted.

"Have patience, will you?" she scoffed. "Just... one second. I need to use the restroom."

"This date's going that badly, huh?"

"If you move from here, I'm going to kill you." She spat before heading over to the washroom.

She looked at her reflection in the mirror. Her breathing hitched, her eyes widening comically as she saw her warped reflection stare back at her.

Her breasts hadn't just gone up a size. They'd gone up multiple. This was unprecedented. Her magic never just activated out-of-the-blue like that. Was this her magic? Was this a curse someone had put on her? It couldn't be. She'd have known if she was cursed. It must've been whatever was in that goddamn dart.

Her boobs had grown so large that they were clearly straining against the dress. Each one squished into the garment's cups such that they spilled upwards rather than outwards. Part of her flesh even spilled out the sides, brushing against her own arms whenever she moved them.

Even just adjusting her cups properly caused her to shudder.

"Mmgh..." she let out a muted moan, slapping her hand over her mouth in horror. She felt every shift of fabric against her nipples. Her chest shifted and warped, but Irida was unsure whether that feeling was real. All she knew was that something was almost... ready to explode out of her. She could see visible veins lining her chest, veins that hadn't been as visible before. Her body felt like it needed to burst.

The veins made her blanch. It wasn't just the veins. This feeling of fullness, all of it lined up with the side effect she'd desperately been trying to avoid. If they got any bigger...

She splashed some water on her face. Enough. She needed to get a grip. This was a problem for later. Compartmentalization. Valentia's teachings.

She was being selfish. The time for Irida came outside of missions. The time for The Mirror was now.

She walked back out gingerly, but she glimpsed one of the servers' tattoos. They'd tried to hide it with their clothing, but Irida could make out the telltale insignia of a fang on their nape. Red Vipers. Of course they'd infested this place as well.

Soren was a hot commodity now. She'd need to make sure he was as oblivious as ever. She was making progress, progress that'd be all for naught if he caught onto anything.

She watched the assassin closely. She couldn't take him out here; too many eyes. She returned to Soren.

"I pray you didn't cause another scene?" she asked, sitting opposite him.

"There was this really kind lady who I spoke to just now. Said they offered free appetizers. Souvlaki or something." he mused.

She paled, noticing a waitress clearly conversing with the assassin she'd just seen. This place was swimming with assailants. She could not keep him here for long.

The two waiters showed up with the food, their smiles thinly veiling murderous intent. "Here's your souvlaki, good sir. Served with delicious tzatziki."

"Oh, I love tzatziki. I'd eat it plain as a kid!" she exclaimed, reaching for the small bowl. The Viper clearly did not intend for this, as he tried to swerve. Irida's bosom knocked over a bottle of water, which fell right onto the plate.

The ceramic plate the waiter was holding toppled, spilling the sauce onto him and sending the skewers onto the floor. "Agh! Shit! SHIT!" he yelled, frantically rubbing his hands.

Idiots. They couldn't even be tasked to use poison. They'd tried acid.

"S-Sorry!" Irida yelled, getting up. She slipped on the skewers. "Whoa!" she yelled, using the other waiter as a cushion, falling onto her and slamming her head onto the hard floor.

"Ack!" she grunted.

"Irida!" Soren got up from his seat, checking on her and the waitress she'd knocked out. The commotion attracted a few more staff members.

The Red Vipers, clearly getting desperate, made themselves known. Irida's eyes darted around. "Stay here, Soren. I'll go wipe myself up. And use the bathroom."

"Huh? But you-"

"Just enjoy the food! I'll be back!" she yelled, disappearing into the crowd as she analyzed the room, noticing the numerous Red Vipers clearly ready to make their move.

One readied a pistol from the far end. Irida threw a dagger into his crotch as he doubled over in pain. As she walked around, she verified that the Red Vipers hadn't completely taken over this place. They weren't that skilled. Most of the staff were friendly.

As the waitstaff brought Soren his food, Irida continued to take out the assassins. One of them sat alone at a desk, glaring at Soren. He readied a pistol, only for her to slam his face into the plate so hard it broke, knocking him out.

Another Viper was on the second floor, poised to take down the target. Irida flung a knife upward, through his hand as he screamed in pain, attracting further attention to him.

The crowd had by now picked up on the commotion. There was chaos, people gasping and shrieking, bailing out of the restaurant as Irida used the cover to continue her spree. The Vipers, however, were noticing her presence. She hid near the corner to the washroom.

She prayed Soren hadn't noticed, but upon looking for him, she found him right where he was, enjoying a sandwich like it were his last day alive, while people ran out around him.

The momentary distraction was enough for a man to tackle her into the washroom. He readied a knife to stab her, but she caught his arm, grabbing him in a triangle choke. He lifted her off the floor, as she took him down with her legs, causing him to stumble into a stall. She finished him by stabbing his back.

Two more burly men arrived, Irida drawing two knives to take them down. Mooks like these were nothing.

---

"Where were you? Man, the food they serve here is amazing." Soren said, rubbing his full stomach.

"My stomach was acting up." She lied. It was a terrible lie, but she deserved some grace after making sure he wasn't poisoned, shot, or stabbed.

"For that long?" he asked, his voice tinged with concern. "Everything alright with you?"

"It is now," she said, brushing some dust off her dress. Getting the blood off her was a pain. The adrenaline was wearing off, as she again felt the titanic weight of her chest. It was heavier now. "Let's just... go."

"What about lunch?"

"Not hungry."

He shrugged. "Well, already paid the bill anyway."

As they walked out, Soren offered her a bag.

"What's this?"

"Souvlaki. With extra tzatziki sauce," he noted. "I had them pack some for ya."

"You..." she blushed, looking at the bag. "Thank you."

"It's the least I could do." He smiled. "Eat up."

She didn't need to eat the food. In fact, there was no logical reason for her to eat it. She was still strong. Soren was none the wiser. Eating would be a distraction. But something about his earnestness. His sincerity.

It made her heart clench.

"So, um, what now?" he asked. "Are we done for the day or-"

"No!" she blurted, swallowing the bite she'd taken. "I-I mean... there's still more to explore. Like the lantern bridge! It's not far from here!"

He shrugged. "Sure."

The two walked over to the destination. It was nearing dusk. Couples walked over the water, the lanterns' gentle orange light illuminating their journey. This was very much a couple's activity.

"Wow," he said breathlessly. "This is beautiful."

"This is Navara," she said in a soft voice. "I'm happy you're enjoying it."

"I'm enjoying it thanks to you," he chuckled. "You've been an excellent date."

"I-I have?"

"Yeah. You're spunky. You've got heart, and it's clear you care. Dunno what I did to earn so much care. My little magic show couldn't have been it."

"You don't know what you did?" she tilted her head.

"Usually when people talk to me, it's cuz they want something. 'Soren, do this'. 'Soren, fix that'. 'Soren, help me'," he scoffed. "You haven't asked me to do anything. You're just here. With me. Having fun."

"Yes, of course." She said, a small laugh bubbling up from her throat. "I like you, Soren. You're handsome, funny, and charming. You underestimate how much brightening up my day meant to me."

"I guess I do," he took her hand. "I doubt your taking me to this clearly romantic setup is an accident."

"It isn't."

His grip tightened. "Good. You've... brightened up my day too."

She looked down at her hand. Soren was a target. He was too powerful to be left alone.

Him being lonely, him not having a single authentic presence in his life, not having time to do what he enjoyed, that didn't mean he was innocent. That didn't mean he wasn't a threat.

It just meant he was a fool. A man who ran from his destiny.

She was born to do this. Built to be an arm of the institution saving her city. She didn't have any friends either. Her job wasn't 'fun'. So what? She wasn't a child. She didn't need such stupid pleasures in her life. The only pleasure she needed was success. Her job brought her that pleasure.

Wanting any more than that was selfish.

As they walked onto the bridge, she picked up the clear wonder in his expression. Her hand tightened on his. Her center of gravity was already thrown off by her ever-expanding bust, and the sloped wooden bridge wasn't helping.

"This place could use some fireworks." He noted.

"Not much of a concept here, I'm afraid." She noted. "I've heard stories of celebrations special enough to warrant them, but the night isn't exactly a safe time here."

"I'd like to think this event is pretty special," he smirked, pulling her close. Her bosom squished into him. Her breath hitched at the contact. It felt good. Scarily good.

Her gaze almost got lost in his, that was until she saw a man pull out a gun from afar.

She pulled him downwards into a kiss. The bullet whizzed past where his head was a moment ago. What now? The man could just fire again.

Her eyes widened as another man kicked the gunman down into the water below. His eyes met Irida's. He sneered.

"Wow. You're forward," Soren grinned giddily.

"Soren, wait-"

He tried to pull her in for another kiss, her eyes darting to the man approaching her with purpose. She slowly pushed away before throwing Soren over her and off the bridge, into the water.

"Whoa!"

"Sorry!" she yelled, her turning her attention to the man, drawing her knives. "Who the hell are you?"

"Name's Rocco Ferretti," he cracked his knuckles. He was a scruffy yet imposing man. Stubble coated his pointy chin, and a messy ponytail of black hair extended down his back. He wore a sharp suit with a sword attached at his hip. "You're one of them Belladonna women. I've seen ya 'round." His green eyes assessed her.

She blitzed him, trying to slice his head off before Soren recovered. He drew his sword, which resembled a rapier, parrying her attacks. He effortlessly weaved through her rapid fast swipes.

"You're sloppy. Not what I expected from someone like you. You're that shapeshifting chick, right?" he asked. "Where's your fake face?"

She clicked her tongue, throwing a knife at him to occupy him as she went in low. He flipped, kicking her in the chin and avoiding the knife in the same motion. She grunted, struggling to maintain balance thanks to her swaying chest. "Shit!"

He smirked. "Damn. Enormous jugs you've got there. Big tits weren't in the dossier."

She gritted her teeth. Her boobs were getting even bigger, and they were slowing her down. The surrounding crowd had already noticed, most of them panicking as they cleared out. "Why are you making a commotion? You're going to get the authorities' attention, you idiot."

"Don't care. I just want a good fight," he smirked, his teeth crooked. "You're not giving me one. Your balance is off."

She yelled, trying desperately to kill him quickly.

"Slow. Sloppy. Sad. What the hell are you doing? Women with tits your size shouldn't be fighting at all, much less fighting this poorly. What, did you give yourself an upsize for this mission?" he scoffed, sweeping out her legs. He raised his sword.

"I'll kill you and get to the main event."

A bead of sweat rolled down her face as her situation became impossible to ignore.

Her breasts were growing at an alarming rate. She couldn't stop their growth. In fact, she couldn't do anything. Her magic wasn't working. At all. She couldn't change her face, her body, her skin tone, or even her hair. It was as if a part of her was locked. What the hell had that bullet done to her? How had it nullified her magic?

More importantly, she was going to die. She hadn't failed Valentia before. She *couldn't* fail her. Not after how much she'd done for her. Not after she'd saved her from that house. From that life.

"Stop-!"

From the water erupted the Firewalker. Sparks exuded from his body naturally, his eyes glowing. The smile on his face was gone. Rocco immediately jumped back.

Irida paled. "Soren, wait!" she said, crawling away. "I can explain!"

He looked at her, then back at Ferretti. "You don't need to."

"What?" she said, accepting her fate.

"You have a target on your head, right? It all makes sense now. You randomly disappearing, being on edge the whole time, all of that." His lips twisted into a grin. "You didn't wanna tell me 'cuz you didn't want me to worry. You're really sweet, y'know that, Irida?"

...

Huh?

"I...I..."

He knelt in front of her, smiling in a way that made her breath slow down a little. The world seemed to dull around her.

"It's okay," he said, rising back up. "I'll protect you."

"What? Soren, you can't. You-"

"Don't worry," he turned. "I'm the strongest."

---

## Chapter 5

Irida had never felt the urge to shapeshift into someone else so badly before. That way she could escape being in this situation. Somehow, the man she'd been trying to take down and quite literally just threw off a bridge, was fighting to protect *her*.

Irida wasn't stupid enough to break her cover. She could still use him to her benefit, but the bigger issue was that he'd be on edge now. Waiting for sneak attacks. Worse, he'd be watching her specifically. To 'protect' her.

This was compounded by her breasts feeling so engorged that she was struggling to get to her feet properly. Her worst fears were coming true.

Rocco Ferretti smirked. "So there he is. The Firewalker. You have a-"

"Soren!" she called out, interrupting the merc.

"Yeah?"

"He's going to lie to you about you being the target. It's all a ploy to get me isolated."

"What?! No, it's not!" Rocco scoffed.

"See! He's angry!"

"I'm confused, not angry!"

"I got it," Soren grinned. "You still wanna go? I don't love killing people. Don't hate it either, though."

Rocco pointed his blade at Soren. "You bet your ass I do! I've been waiting for this!" His rapier charged with lightning as he swung it around, arcs of electricity dancing off the weapon in dangerous blue sparks.

He thrust the sword forward, as Soren dodged. He prepared a spark, but Irida was not letting him bring even more attention to them. "Soren!"

"What now?" Soren asked, turning back as a furious Rocco tried to tag him, only for him to avoid every wild stab and slice.

"Don't use your magic!"

"Why?" he said, ducking a wild lunge from Rocco, who snarled.

"We can't draw attention to ourselves."

Soren sighed. "Well. You heard the lady."

"Why the hell are you even protecting her?" Rocco grunted. "She's part of the family that runs this damn place!"

"Wow, you're royalty?" Soren asked with intrigue. "You didn't tell me you were a princess."

"No!" both Rocco and Irida said simultaneously.

"She's nothing. Just another pawn for the elites who force us to scrap for everything we've got, while they sit on their thrones and lap up all the goods." Rocco scoffed. "She's after your- oof!"

He was interrupted as Irida threw a nearby rock at him.

"Ow! You bitch!"

Soren took off the red sash around his person, spinning it around. "Let's do this."

"The hell are you gonna do with that? Dance with me?" Rocco grinned as he swung his sword in a wide arc of electricity, but as it met the loose fabric of Soren's sash, it deflected off.

"Huh?" Rocco gasped. "How?"

"A magician never reveals his secrets." Soren smirked before whipping the sash around Rocco's leg, taking him off his feet. Rocco rolled out of the way to avoid a stomp from Soren, kicking the back of the Firewalker's knee before getting up.

However, his ensuing attacks were somehow deflected by the sash. It behaved like fabric when Soren spun it around, but somehow had enough weight to act like a whip and deflect Rocco's strikes. Another thrust of his rapier hit the red fabric, bending it, but entirely unable to pierce it. Soren wrapped the cloth around Rocco's sword hand, twisting the weapon out of his grip as it clattered to the floor. The mercenary grunted as he kneed him in the gut, causing him to collapse.

"You're... good." he coughed. "But I'm not done yet!"

He rose, his body crackling with lightning. "I'm going all out!"

Soren smiled, creating a small ball of sparks. "Before you do that, can you hold this for me?"

"Wha-?" Rocco tried to bat it away as Soren threw it at him, but it stuck onto his hand. "Damn!" he shook it vigorously.

"Didn't I just tell you not to do that?!" Irida exclaimed, at this point very much thinking she should've taken the chance to make a break for it.

The ball flickered, glowing brighter and more intense, as Rocco braced for an explosion.

Only for it to die out immediately.

"Huh?"

The distraction was enough for Soren to land a nose-shattering punch to Ferretti's face. The mercenary crumpled to the ground in a heap.

"Fooled both of ya." Soren winked.

Irida rolled her eyes. "We need to get out of here."

As she tried to get to her feet, she felt the enormity of her breasts, which jiggled with every micro-movement. She put a hand underneath them to steady them, letting out a sharp gasp as she got to her feet.

They'd gotten even bigger. Soren was staring.

"What is it?"

"Did the dress shrink or..." Soren trailed off.

"Shut it! Pervert," she pouted. "I don't know what's going on. Clearly I was inflicted with some sort of curse."

"Hell of a curse."

"Stop staring and move." She huffed, grabbing his hand and dragging him along.

"Belladonna..." Rocco muttered. "Ruining this city..."

"What was he going on about, anyway? You're a pawn of some big noble?" Soren asked.

"Navara has a severely corrupt underbelly. House Belladonna is all that protects it from devolving into a cesspool of violence." Irida scoffed. "We want to keep peace."

"Peace, huh?" Soren nodded. "Politicians in charge of this place have a funny idea of peace."

"You spoke to them?" she asked, attempting to gather more information.

"Eh, casually. Typical bigwigs, y'know? Making big promises. Going on and on about the 'collective' and how the city is 'well-managed'. If people are after a nice girl like yourself, that kinda stuff falls flat."

"R-right." She sighed. "It's getting dangerous out in the open. We need to find a safe space."

"Where's that?"

"Just follow me. I know a way."

"You gonna explain that kiss?"

"You're not getting another if you keep asking."

---

Walking soon became unbearable. Not because Irida's legs hurt. Not in the slightest. It's because every step caused her chest to bounce, and worse, every step caused her increasingly sensitive nipples to rub against the now straining fabric of her top.

What could this be? How did Séverine's dart do this? What the hell would've happened if it'd hit Soren?

Questions flew desperately through her mind to rationalize what she was going through. Nothing made sense. The world around her seemed to go out of focus as she could feel the pounding of her own heart. Worse than that, she could feel a deep heat pooling in her very core.

Every step sent a jolt up her spine, her thighs unconsciously began to rub together, begging for some sort of relief from this torture.

Worst of all were her breasts. She could've handled pain. This was not pain, this was something she'd never properly experienced before. This sense of feeling like she needed to let something out.

She could feel her breasts hitting her ribcage with every step, she could feel their slow growth in her dress, she could feel the pressure building up. This wasn't just inflated breast tissue.

Her magic was often purely cosmetic. She could give herself a more muscular body, but to make it actually grant her the benefits of said body, she'd need to have a concrete understanding of how that musculature worked.

The same was true with her bust size. She could make it purely cosmetic, but if she did, they'd look obviously fake. Making them look realistic was a problem. Bust sizes within reason were easy.

The size she was at now? Impossible under normal circumstances. But it was still possible to make them behave realistically. Her mother used this trick all the time.

Her expanding boobs were filled with milk.

"Irida?"

Her head jerked up to look at Soren. "What?"

"You're falling behind. Also, I called your name like three times." he raised an eyebrow. "All okay?"

She looked down at her chest. "I wish."

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw more tattooed thugs. An entire group of them. "Shit!"

Soren turned to see, grinning, only for Irida to pull him away. "Hey-!"

"You are *not* creating a scene!" she whispered.

Irida shuffled into a nearby alleyway with Soren, using the evening's shadows to give them some cover.

"Mmgh..." she groaned, a muted sound as she felt her breasts squish against Soren. She squirmed, trying not to make a sound as the Red Viper gang slowly marched around the area.

Soren, for his part, was entirely transfixed on the fact that her boobs were squishing against him.

Her breath hitched. She tried to squirm into a position that was more comfortable, but that only sent her already teetering hormones into a frenzy. A muted gasp left her lips, as she felt her nipples harden against his overly muscular torso.

"What're you doing?" Soren whispered.

"S-shut up... AHN!" she moaned audibly. Loud enough for Soren to hear, and enough that the group of mercenaries stopped in their tracks.

They turned to face the source of the sound, as Soren cursed under his breath. He shimmied out of the alleyway, causing Irida to let out another breathless gasp.

"Sorry about that, my girlfriend and I were just having a little fun back there." Soren tried to explain, only for the Vipers to look at each other, and then back at him.

"Get him!"

Meanwhile, Irida was busy trying to get her body to listen to her, but she could feel a wetness spreading from between her thighs. She felt the irresistible urge to stick her fingers into her panties and do something about the immense feeling of desire spreading through her body.

What the hell was she becoming? She was turning into a fucking whore. Someone who couldn't even keep her emotions under control.

A whore. Just like her mother.

She let out a pained cry, slamming her fist against the wall. "Stop. Stop!" she yelled furiously. Her magic didn't obey. Her body was betraying her.

And yet, despite the overwhelming hatred for this situation that coursed through her, a part of her enjoyed this. A part that she wanted so badly to kill, to ignore, yet only got louder as she tried to bury it.

This was unbelievably hot.

Her breasts were so huge now that they were touching the opposite wall, where they hadn't been before. Her breaths came out unevenly, her face heating up.

A rush built up in her bosom. As if something was begging to be let out. She felt tight, barely able to breathe. She let out another raw moan, scraping herself out of the alleyway to get away from these overwhelming sensations.

She doubled over, panting heavily. As she slowly straightened up, she noticed Soren choking the last remaining Red Vipers with his sash, as he looked at her before doing a double take.

"I'm sorry." She said breathlessly. "They must've gotten bigger, and-"

"Not that." he pointed to her chest. "You're uh... leaking."

She went pale, clutching the front of her dress and feeling the wetness. She was barely even able to reach the front of her bust, but she could still feel those two sodden splotches where her nipples were. Just touching them felt like touching a raw nerve.

She opened her mouth, but no words came out. "I thought... I mean..."

Soren had a clear look of concern on his face. "I've never seen this kind of curse before. I mean, enlarging a body part is one thing but, you wouldn't happen to be pregnant, would you?"

She shook her head slowly. "I'm-" her voice caught in her throat. She forced herself to say it. "I'm a virgin."

"Ah."

Embarrassing. She felt like disappearing. This is who Irida Belladonna was. A complete mess. An adult whose life was built on seduction, yet never once had she even laid in bed with someone.

She used to have pride in that. Pride that she was nothing like her mother, nothing like the woman who used their family's gift for hedonism.

"God..." she said, trembling. "What is happening to me? I... I..."

"You look great," he noted.

"What?!"

Soren put his hands up in placation. "I mean, it sucks that this curse is messing with your body, but you're rocking the look."

"Soren, I'm literally lactating!"

"I know, I know. Doesn't hurt to look on the bright side, though, right?"

"What is the bright side of having these... mounds of flesh attached to me?" Irida gestured to her now heaving rack, which was slowly tearing the seams of her top.

"All the more to love?" he offered. "Listen, I know this is a lot. But you're acting like you're impossible to look at. You're not."

She groaned. "Why're you so okay with this? I look disgusting! My body was lithe and elegant; it was-"

"Pretty," he got close to her, taking her hands in his. There was barely any distance between his torso and hers. "I know."

"You don't. You haven't known me for more than a few days."

"Feel like I don't need to know you to say you're pretty." Soren countered. "But... you're a lot more than pretty to me. You're sassy, you're funny, you're smart, and you're a damn good dancer."

Her heart's traitorous little jump didn't go unnoticed by her. She looked away, trying to hide her blush.

Wait, why was she trying to hide it?

"I don't know," he said, quieter now. "I just hate seeing you talk about yourself like that. Like it's okay for people to just see one thing about you and decide that's all there is."

"That's not the point." She muttered.

"Guess so," he nodded, a forlorn look on his face. "But I've had people call me the same things my whole life. Hero, weapon, disaster, saviour, whatever. I didn't ask to be those things. I'm a magician here. People see me as just a street performer. That's nice. That's how I'd like to be seen. What's the point of living for what others want?"

"Living for others is selfless."

"People love calling it selfless when you stop wanting things," he stated with an edge to his tone. "They dress it up as being noble, when it's actually just sad. They get to choose your life for you because you're too 'selfless' to say otherwise. They'd never do for you what you do for them."

Would the people she lived for do the same for her? She lived for Valentia. Valentia saved her. Irida could only live the life she was currently living because of the Belladonna family.

Was that the way she wanted to live, though?

"I'm already living the way I want to live."

"Good. Then I'm going to help you with that. Once we get through this, I'll find a way to fix this curse, alright?" he gave her a kiss on the cheek, leaving her frozen like some lovesick schoolgirl.

"Where to next? It's getting dark." he looked around.

"R-right. Yes," she snapped back to reality, observing the unconscious bodies of the mercenaries scattered around the floor. "We need to get to the Palazzo."

"The what?"

"Just follow me. It's safe there."

As badly as she wanted to run, Irida could only manage a weak shuffle. She had to keep her bust supported with one arm, and even then every step felt more agonizing than the last. The wetness of her dress felt ever-present, and her urges were only getting worse after that kiss from Soren.

"Dammit, I swear there was a left turn here." She muttered, looking around the jungle of concrete. "Where the hell is the archway?"

"Don't tell me we're lost."

"We're not lost! I'd never get lost." Irida affirmed. "I just need to think."

She heard a shuffling of footsteps as a gunshot whizzed past Soren's ear. She pushed him out of the way. "Watch out!"

He quickly leapt towards her, pinning her against a wall to avoid the next shot, before he lit up a small spark from his fingertips and fired it at their attacker, blowing him up.

"How dangerous." He mused.

Irida leaned her head back against the wall, breathing heavily as her surroundings got hazier. She heard a loud rip in her dress. The sudden action had set her tits on fire, and she could not stop this fever that was overtaking her.

"Fuck!" she groaned.

"Whoa, you okay?" he backed off, but she clutched her dress, no longer being able to handle its feeling on her chest.

"I need to get it off." She said, almost crazed.

"What?!"

"I can't handle it anymore, Soren! It's suffocating! I need to breathe!" she yelped, tearing the remains of the dress into pieces, letting her enormous boobs flop into the evening air. "Aahn~"

She clamped a hand over her mouth, looking at Soren's equally mortified visage.

He looked around, making sure no one was around. "This is not what I expected to be doing today."

"I'm so sorry..."

"Don't apologize." He scoffed. "Do you need anything?"

She squirmed. The cool air on her exposed chest caused her nipples to stiffen immediately, twin peaks poking out of her darkened areolae, which were now warped and stretched far beyond what she remembered.

Her veins were very visible beneath her pale skin, and every beat of her heart sent her one step closer to what felt like insanity.

"I need..." She managed, letting out another moan of frustration. "I need some relief from this fucking haze! These feelings, I-I don't know how to stop them. Please, Soren..."

She looked at him, her eyes telling a story of complete and utter desperation. She refused to cry. But she was close. So close to begging him to do something. Anything.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes!" she exclaimed, before immediately shrinking, praying no one heard. "Yes. Please. Just do it. Do whatever you need to. Just-"

He captured her lips in a kiss. Unlike on the bridge, this one was fierce, charged with raw desire and passion.

She let loose a needy whine as her lips locked with his. Her distended boobs pressed hard into his tunic. He held her close, as her leg wrapped behind his.

Every logical bone in her body screamed at her to stop. This was horrifically indecent to be doing in public. This wasn't the plan, her being a total floozy nymphomaniac was not what was supposed to happen.

But then...

Why did it feel so good?!

She felt his firm hands on her back. She could smell the distinct scent of sandalwood from his body. The hard planes of his form felt orgasmic against her.

He pulled back before kissing her neck. She covered her mouth, trying to suppress her embarrassing sounds of arousal. She felt her bare nipples tense up and spurt, as white, viscous milk sputtered out.

Soren moved so it didn't fall onto his clothes, and instead watched it dribbled down her body.

"I've never seen this before."

"You've never seen a woman lactate?"

"Where the hell would I have ever seen that?!"

She chuckled. "Heh. You're right. You can touch them."

"Hm?"

"Touch them." She said, looking up at him. "Please."

His hands drifted towards her swollen bosom before making contact. They were like dough under his calloused palms, squishing and jiggling obscenely. She groaned, rubbing her thighs together as her clit so desperately wished for stimulation.

Soren's hands played with her boobs, hefting their mass. He then pulled her into his arms, turning her back to him and grabbing them from behind. She grunted as he bounced them, reaching for her nipples with his thumbs and arousing her further.

"Hah... Hah... MMPH!" She bit her lip. "Nngh! Soren! AH~!"

More milk spurted out of her nipples, spilling onto his hands. He pulled back again, looking at them. Irida turned her head, mortified.

"No."

"Should I?"

"Do *not* taste it."

"Why not?"

"B-Because!"

"Because what?"

"It's my fucking breast milk, Soren!"

"I mean, who else is gonna try?"

She covered her face in shame, as he tried it. "Mm. Not bad."

"Just kill me now."

"How about this?" he asked, grabbing her again, as she let out a strained gasp.

"Wait-! Ahn!" she grunted. "Fuck... oh god, please don't stop."

Her whimpering devolved into moans, as Soren's hands slid down her torso and towards her crotch, slipping under her dress. She made no move to stop him, as he slid his fingers into her underwear.

She tensed up the second his finger brushed up against her clit, shuddering as he massaged her folds. She could feel herself drooling, letting out sharp grunts as he edged her closer and closer to completion.

"F-Fuck!" she yowled. Milk squirted out of her breasts in one last defiant blast, as she came at the same time. She covered her mouth to stifle the yell, but it was still loud enough that they probably weren't going to be alone for long.

She collapsed back into his arms, exhausted after the pleasure she'd just experienced. Her breasts were now a tad smaller, but not by much. "Ugh."

"That was fun." Soren remarked, sitting her down so she could catch her breath. She noticed a very obvious bulge in his pants. "What?"

Irida smiled slightly. "Looks like it was fun for you too."

He looked down. "Oh. I'll sort this out."

"You sure? I can-" she paused. What the hell was she trying to do? Offer to suck him off? "I mean, yeah. Okay."

As he disappeared around a corner, she looked up at the orange sky. Tears slowly formed in her eyes, as she quickly wiped them away. There was no place for tears. Her body had been betraying her all day, and now it was embarrassing her one last time by making her cry. Like a weakling.

Like a girl.

*"But... you're a lot more than pretty to me. You're sassy, you're funny, you're smart, and you're a damn good dancer."*

"Shut up." She muttered. "Please."

---

## Chapter 6

"Are you done?" Irida called out in a hushed whisper.

Soren walked out from behind the wall, adjusting his pants. "More or less. That was-"

"I don't want to talk about it." Irida said despondently. "Let's just go."

She struggled to get to her feet. Her breasts were not as overstimulated currently, and were ever so slightly smaller, but Irida knew this was only temporary. The bigger issue was that she was now topless, and had probably the biggest breasts in the entire city just flopping around.

As she rose, she expected her back to flare up in pain, but she felt only a slight tightness. Her magic's malfunction had at the very least given her a body to handle the extra weight.

She met Soren's gaze. His cheeks were flushed. She had a feeling hers were too. Her eyes still stung from the breakdown she'd just had.

She had to rein this in. Her goal was to take down Soren and bring him to the Palazzo. Leading him there was a colossal risk, but that'd allow her a bigger window to knock him out and more support if he resisted.

Yes. Knock him out. After that, things could go back to normal. Everything would be okay.

"You're going to walk around like that?" he asked. "Hell of a fashion statement."

Irida scoffed. "God no. I'll need to repurpose something."

He handed her his sash. "Here."

"What? Isn't that your weapon? You were using it to fight, weren't you?" She exclaimed, incredibly puzzled at his actions.

"You need it more than me. Drape it over yourself. It'll probably keep you safe from some attacks too."

"Soren, I can't..." she trailed off. Why was he doing this? Why did he let his guard down so readily around her? This had to be some sort of fake out. He had to have some secret plan he wasn't telling her about. That had to be the case.

"I'll be fine," he assured. "Last person here you should be worried about is me."

"I am! I am worried about you! Why are you just-" she caught herself. "Why are you so blase about this?"

He chuckled. "That's a first. Someone's worried about me. Don't know whether I should be flattered or offended."

Irida felt like a snake was constricting around her throat. He put her at ease just by being near her. That presence of reassurance. It was so... different. Different from what she was used to, even from Val.

"It's a compliment." She muttered. "I have no idea how you're so calm about this."

"Oh, I'm not calm. I'm having a blast. C'mon!"

She draped his sash over bountiful boobs as they moved along. They made a lot more progress without Irida's hormones working against her.

Not that they were completely silent. Every step sent Irida's breasts jiggling obscenely, without the dress to contain them. The sash hid her nipples decently well, but she still stuck out like a sore thumb in any public space.

She could feel them slowly swelling up as they walked, albeit at a far slower rate than before. She prayed that this was a good sign.

Aside from a few stragglers annoying them here and there, their journey to the Palazzo was mostly unimpeded. Irida slowly felt her heart slowing down to acceptable levels, recognizing familiar Belladonna agents. Most policemen in the city were in Val's pocket, so it was no surprise that law enforcement was denser around their hideout.

Unfortunately, said agents also recognized her, gawking like idiots at her mishap. She heard the whispers.

"Is that The Mirror?"

"The fuck's she doin'?"

"Is that Firewalker guy into this kinda stuff?"

"She's not wearing anything, they're just out..."

"Kinda hot."

"No way, she looks like a whore. Like one of those chicks in the Roseveil District."

Irida flinched.

Soren shot one of them a look. He walked up to them before Irida could grab a hold of him.

"Hey! You're a policeman, right?" He put an arm around the man.

"Y-Yeah?"

"Your job is to protect people, isn't it?"

"Yeah?"

"And last I checked, your job wasn't to gawk at random girls, right?"

"... Yeah."

"So keep your trap shut and help a girl out, would you?" he said, the edge in his voice clear as day. "My girlfriend here needs your help to get some assassins off our back."

The cop looked at her. Irida blanched, a bead of sweat going down her face. She did everything she could to beg him to play along with just her eyes.

Tragically, he was not looking at her eyes.

"What the hell are you doing?" she whispered at Soren.

"I don't like dudes who talk behind others' back. Especially others I like."

"That's not the point, you just-!"

Soren dodged out of the way of a bullet aiming for his head, hitting the Belladonna agent and killing him immediately. Irida cursed as the Marrow Syndicate slowly made their presence known.

Séverine walked out of an alleyway, adjusting her gloves. She glared at Irida, sizing her up.

"Uh oh." Soren muttered, looking around.

These weren't the Red Vipers. They weren't just mercenaries. They were a tactical unit, the Marrow Syndicate's strike team designed explicitly to take out targets that earned the ire of the group.

"You've been sloppy, Irida. We found you a lot easier than we expected." Séverine spoke. "If it wasn't for your meddling, we'd have achieved our goal a lot sooner."

Irida's eyes narrowed as numerous cops arrived to engage the Marrow Syndicate forces. "Stand down, Séverine. Innocent people's lives are at stake."

Séverine raised an eyebrow. "And?"

"I don't want people not involved in this to die."

"You sealed their fates when you interfered in our business." Séverine's hand glowed with a blue hum.

"Get 'em!" one policeman yelled, much to Irida's horror.

The cops immediately opened fire, as the Marrow strike team each activated their magical abilities. One of them turned into a living blur, speeding into an officer and tackling him into a wall.

Another raised a wall of ice to block the bullets, his teammate splitting the earth to swallow the Belladonna agents whole.

The civilians still outside in the evening time immediately screamed, evacuating the area as one of the policemen manifested a gigantic ball of lava, firing it at the ice user.

"Wait, stop!" Irida yelled as the massive molten ball sailed through the wall of ice and right into a building, obliterating its foundations and causing it to collapse. There were three people about to be crushed by the rubble. Soren dashed forward, sparks flying off him, to save them.

"To be expected from someone not involved in day-to-day affairs like yourself." Séverine noted.

"What?" Irida turned back to the blue-suited woman.

"Did you truly think we'd hold back just on the account of the civvies?" Séverine snarled. "All the Marrow Syndicate wants is for Navara to remain quiet. Unproblematic. It's your 'family' that's made all of that so hard."

"We aren't the ones starting a civil war."

"This was bound to happen. You haven't put the Firewalker down despite multiple opportunities. It's obvious you plan to use the Nullstone to control him. We aren't letting the Belladonna's grip tighten across this city even further." Séverine scowled. "You're a fool. Always have been. Now you look like one too."

"This is *your* fault." Irida clutched her chest. "That dart you shot me with contained some sort of curse!"

"It was no curse." Séverine snapped. "It was Nullstone. I'd secured a small amount of dust from our encounter that night. Obviously not enough to accomplish anything, so we tried to replicate what we could using Eternite. It having this effect on you was unprecedented."

Irida paled. It all made sense now. The Nullstone dart was what was interfering with her magic. They'd clearly used Eternite dust in their attempts to recreate it, which is what caused her magic to surge and become difficult to control.

"You... injected Nullstone into me?"

"It was meant to hit the Firewalker. You got in the way." Séverine said. "Though I must say. It helped us in the end. The only way we could track you down to here is because you left a trail."

Irida's eyes widened.

"Of milk." Séverine smirked, for the first time since she'd known her. "How amusing."

Séverine's hands glowed as Irida took out a knife from her rucksack and flung it at the assailant. Séverine merely dodged.

"That was slow. Slower than I'd expect from you."

Irida grimaced. "So you do pay attention to me."

Séverine fired a shot of pure concussive force into Irida, unfortunately hitting her right in the chest. She gasped, flying backward into a wall, but didn't feel as hurt as she should've been.

She looked down at her chest. Soren's sash had protected her.

She coughed, walking forward. "You can't even put me down when I'm like this, can you?"

Séverine rolled her eyes, before firing another bolt at Irida's knee.

"Agh!"

She collapsed as Séverine grabbed her by the hair. "You're so cocky. Over what? Your status? Your skill? Your perceived value?"

Irida looked up at her with hate. "I earned those things. I fight with the Belladonna to keep Navara out of the clutches of people like you!"

Séverine pulled her up and threw her on the ground. "Look around you. *This* is what you call protection? This is what good the Belladonna brings to this place?!"

The entire city block around them was falling apart. The Belladonna lava mage fired another gout of magma, which a Marrow assassin dodged, causing it to hit the supports of a large bridge, causing it to collapse, along with a few buildings neighbouring it.

Meanwhile, a flying mage tackled another through multiple buildings, as people screamed to run away from the falling debris. Fire slowly enveloped the block.

"This... this isn't..."

"You aren't any better than us," Séverine growled. "Once they stop having a use for you, they'll abandon you too. You're just a tool. You're The Mirror."

"I'm not!" Irida elbowed Séverine in the gut and pushed her away. "The Belladonna is a family, not a syndicate."

"Do you truly believe that they'll need you after you've lost your magic?"

"...What?"

"Did you think the dart I shot you with was temporary?" Séverine taunted. "I don't know how the side effects work, but injecting even a minuscule amount of Nullstone directly into a mage's bloodstream deprives them of magic. Permanently."

"You're lying."

"You think I'd lie over something I'd never even planned?" Séverine said. "You're not even The Mirror anymore. Who's left? Just a fighter? Not even the Red Vipers would need a fighter whose arms can't reach past her own breasts."

Irida clenched her fists, swinging wildly at Séverine, who avoided every strike. Séverine herself was very well endowed, but her busty chest now looked petite compared to Irida's gargantuan breasts.

Séverine kicked her in the side, as she grunted in pain. She followed it up with a punch to the face, and then a palm to the chest, firing her concussive bolt point-blank.

Irida was on the ground, the attack having hit her square in the breasts. She held them in her hands, as the sudden impact stimulated them again. She let out a breathless gasp.

*"Who's left?"*

...

No one.

She was nothing. She couldn't be of use to Valentia like this. She was a waste of space, a waste of resources and a waste of time. Nullstone was already rare. Whatever Séverine injected her with wasn't even pure Nullstone. Curing her was out of the question.

She looked up at Séverine, tears forming in her eyes out of pure hatred. She'd taken everything from her. Her magic, her ok, her status, everything. All in one fell swoop. Turned her into a complete joke meant to be jeered at by everyone.

How could she go on living? How could she sit around and drain Belladonna resources like a leech?

Memories flooded into her mind of Val. She'd understand. Surely she'd understand. Surely she'd make everything okay. She always made everything okay.

Séverine's palm charged up with blue energy. "Die."

Irida shut her eyes, expecting the kill shot, only for said shot to never come.

She opened them, finding Soren landing in front of her, sparks flickering around his body. He looked back at her.

"Everything's gonna be okay."

Irida's chest tightened to where she could barely breathe. She tried to speak, tried to maintain some semblance of her bravado, but all she could do was let out a choked sob.

"The Firewalker. Good. You're just who I wanted to see." Séverine's palms charged blue.

"Who are you again?"

"I'm-"

"Nevermind. Forget I asked." His orange eyes glimmered with light. "You're just the asshole who made Irida cry."

"Stop."

Soren's eyes widened as he turned around, seeing Irida hold his sleeve.

"Please. Just... stop."

"What?"

Séverine tried to attack, but Soren dodged, firing a spark at her that exploded into a glittery, rainbow blast. Séverine was sent flying.

Irida was struggling to keep it together. Soren picked her up into his arms.

"All good?"

Irida shook her head. Soren took off from the ground, using his magic to fly her to a safe location.

"Stay here. No one's gonna find you. I'll handle it." he assured her. She could hear the chaos continuing in the background, Soren was almost forgotten in the fervor of battle.

"Don't." she muttered. "Just... just kill me, Soren."

He looked at her in shock. "Kill you? Why would I-?"

"I'm nothing. My magic is gone. I'm just a whore. A whore with tits bigger than her head, leaking milk everywhere she goes." She cried. "I can't fight, I can't hide, I can't even run. I'm a sex object."

"Hey, none of that." Soren knelt in front of her. "You're not just your body."

"You don't get it," she shook her head. "I hate this. This is the last thing I ever wanted to do with my magic, because this is all my mother used to do. She used her body, her magic, for men, for money, for anything that felt good. I hated her for it. And now look at me."

"You didn't choose this."

She chuckled deliriously. "Yes I did. I gave myself an upsize before this date. This is my punishment."

"That's fine, I mean, I didn't even notice early on."

She shook her head in disbelief.

One of the nearby buildings was turned into pure ice, before shattering with a loud crash. Soren shielded her from the impact, as numerous people's screams were heard.

She was holding him back. More people were dying because of her.

"Soren. I've been lying to you," she admitted, hearing her own voice crack.

He chuckled slightly. "What, about people being after you? I figured that was bullshit a while ago. Was only a matter of time before people started coming after me."

She looked away, unable to meet his gaze.

"But... that doesn't explain *why* you lied," Soren added. She heard the tremble in his voice. "Does it?"

"I'm an assassin. I was tasked to seduce you, and then subdue you." She said, almost whispering, and yet it felt louder than any of the surrounding chaos. "My boss deemed you too big a threat to be left on your own, and I specialize in seduction, so I took the job. The entire date today, and me asking you out yesterday... It was all a lie," she uttered, though her voice failed her at the last second.

Soren's smile turned from earnest to cold, despite his expression barely changing. "Of course. It all makes sense now."

"I'm sorry."

"No, I should be the one apologizing. I wasted everybody's time." He laughed. "Here I was, trying to have fun. Trying to put all the thoughts about the mission aside, trying not to think too hard about things and just enjoy Navara."

Irida looked on in sorrow as he turned to her. Another loud crash happened just behind them. Soren looked up, his current lack of concern over what was happening to Navara evident.

"Why bother, right? Because people like me don't deserve to be happy. People like me are just weapons. Walking weapons who don't have human lives, walking weapons who don't have wants or desires or passions!" He exclaimed. "Do you want to know why *I* was sent here?"

She nodded wordlessly.

"The Magic Association wanted me to investigate. To uproot the corruption within Navara and 'save' it. Like I'm some bomb to drop on a problem." He muttered, his expression going from a tired smirk to a frosty glare. "If they wanted me to be a bomb, I could. Why bother being discrete? I could solve this problem in an hour. Burn this city to the ground."

He looked around, as the district they were in was already on fire. A fire that would no doubt spread around the city if Soren decided to contribute.

"Soren, I-"

"How much of you was real?"

Irida's voice died in her throat. More tears streamed down her cheeks. Hot, embarrassing tears.

"Our first meeting was real. I... I'm telling you all of this for a reason." She croaked out. "I can't do this. I can't go through with it. I just can't."

"What?"

"I don't want to hurt you. I can't hurt you." She blubbered. "This day has been the worst day of my life. Everything's been going horrifically wrong, and through it all you've been there. At my side. At the side of the person who's been lying and manipulating you for her own gain."

He went quiet.

"Please believe me." Irida begged. "I'll let you kill me, just please believe me. I don't want to die without you knowing that you matter to me, Soren. Your feelings mattered. Not just as a target but... but as a person. As a man. As... my date."

She saw the flying mage from earlier get shot out of the air, falling down to the ground.

"Do it and leave. Don't let me hold you here any longer." she muttered.

Soren clenched his fists. "How can I believe you? How can I believe anyone anymore? Do you know how hard it is to live? Just live my life without being 'The Firewalker'? I always need to second guess what people want from me. I always need to look deeper into every interaction I have. I can't relax. I can't enjoy myself," he ranted. "The one time I try to do that, I try to ignore every bad thought running through my head, I get led on like a dog."

"You're right." She uttered abruptly before sighing. "I can't ask you to believe me. But I can show you how much you mean to me."

She took a deep breath. She tried to ignore the sounds of war around her. He wasn't going to leave. Not until she gave him a satisfying answer.

"I was an accident. One of my mother's clients. I don't even know which one. She never cared enough to tell me. I don't think he ever came back." She muttered. "She'd shapeshift into whatever her client at the time wanted, and they'd have sex. I heard it. I always heard it. I barely got fed, much less cared for. If she ever talked to me, it'd be about something disgusting."

Soren furrowed his brow, clearly unsure of where she was going with this.

She sniffled.

"I- I don't know how it happened exactly, but... One day she got into trouble. She was always well connected. She'd made an empire out there in that district, and she got into hot water with the Marrow Syndicate. Things escalated, and she was killed in a skirmish." Irida wiped her eyes. "I hated her, Soren. I hated her so much. She sold her body like it was nothing. Warped herself into completely different people because she was turned on by it. When House Belladonna took me in, I wanted so badly to be different."

"Different?"

"So badly to be unlike her. I've never told anyone about this. Not even Val. Not in full." Irida explained. "I want you to know the truth. And the truth is that as much of an idiot as you think you for not seeing through me, I'm just as much of an idiot for falling in love with my target." She noted.

"So no. You can't believe me. I shouldn't have asked for it. Do whatever you want to me. I deserve it."

Irida looked down.

Soren turned his back to her. "You want me to kill you?"

"I have nothing left to live for." A tear rolled down her cheek.

Soren straightened, as if the words she'd just spoken shook him.

"You don't need a reason." Soren said, quietly at first, before getting louder. "I told you before. Live the way you want to live."

Irida's breath hitched.

He turned to look at her, his expression unreadable.

"It's a pain in the ass for me. I can never live the way I want to. But when people like you don't even try, it pisses me off. Don't you *dare* say you have nothing to live for. Everyone has something to live for. It's themselves!"

She flinched at the fire in his voice, but the rage faded just as quickly as it came. Soren's shoulders slumped.

"I don't know anymore." he sighed. "I just-"

Suddenly, a bullet of flame erupted from his abdomen. It burned a small hole in his right. He looked down in horror, seeing the injury in his torso. He looked back at her.

With a quick strike to the head, he crumpled to the floor, and behind him was a man in a suit, his red eyes gleaming in the dark.

"Lucien?"

"Falling in love with your target, hm?" Lucien grinned. "You're even more of a slut than I thought."

She immediately rushed to hold Soren. "He's going to die, you asshole!"

"We can stabilize him. It's only a tiny hole." He noted. "Besides, you're not in any position to be making orders anymore, cow."

She glared at him, though he only laughed.

"The Firewalker has been seized." He called out. "I took him down!"

"You heard everything, didn't you?" She asked.

"It only verified what I already knew. That you're a useless bitch who's too emotional to do your job." Lucien smirked. "Don't worry, though, I'll get you a new job as the communal whore."

---

## Chapter 7

The walk back to the Palazzo felt like a blur to Irida. She didn't register the carnage going on around her. The Marrow did their level best to kill them, but thanks to Lucien and other Belladonna thugs, they got into the Palazzo, a structure so incredibly stable that most mages couldn't even make a dent.

As she made her way down, the place looked darker. Irida was too numb to wonder if it'd always been that dark. Maybe it had. She didn't notice.

She looked down at her chest, bouncing along like usual. She didn't know what to do anymore. She had nothing left. Her magic was gone, her new body made fighting impossible, and the Belladonnas now knew that she'd not only failed her mission, but was actively trying to aid her target.

She was a traitor. She deserved death.

Her eyes wandered to Soren. He refused to kill her. Even after everything she'd done, after she'd torn his heart in two, he hesitated.

*"Everyone has something to live for. It's themselves!"*

Easy for him to say. She'd just betrayed everyone who'd given her a second chance at life. Without the Belladonnas, she'd have starved to death. Or worse.

These thoughts ran through her mind as Lucien and her finally made it down to Valentia's room. Lucien dumped Soren on the ground as medics tended to his wounds. The remaining cronies that were still in the building stared.

Hungrily. Salaciously.

It wasn't just that she was a sex object now. She was a sex object who'd been stripped of the status that put her above these people.

Irida clutched Soren's sash tighter across her chest.

Not long after, they brought in specialized cuffs. They shimmered in a bluish hue. Clearly Nullstone. She couldn't bear to even look.

"Agh... Fuck." He muttered, slowly stirring. His hands were cuffed together, as he got into a kneeling position. "Where am I?"

"Wakey wakey, Sparky." Lucien leered. "Welcome to your new home. And your new family."

Soren looked around, then down at his handcuffs. He tried to break out of them, his face contorting with effort, possibly trying to use magic, but it didn't work. His brow furrowed in confusion. "What the hell is this?"

"Nullstone. It's funny. With your magic, you're the strongest mage there is. Without it, you're just another fucking loser." Lucien kicked Soren in the face, causing him to stumble back.

"Lucien! Stop!" Irida cried.

"Make me." Lucien looked at her with complete disdain. "What are you going to do? Squirt milk at me?"

He stomped on Soren again, grinding his boot against the mage's already injured midsection.

"Agh! AAAGH!" Soren groaned.

"Yeah. You like that? I *own* you now. We all do. You're our dog." Lucien declared. "And we'll whip you into shape no matter how many times you try to resist."

"Gonna have to keep whipping me till I'm dead." Soren chuckled weakly. "You can play house with my corpse."

"Soren..."

Lucien rolled his eyes. "Look, Sparky, your girlfriend's here too."

Lucien twisted Soren's head to look at Irida. The two gazes met, as Irida's throat seized violently. Her breath hitched, Soren's gaze drowning her in guilt.

"I'm sorry," was all she could manage. "This wasn't what I wanted."

"And who the fuck asked you what you wanted?" Lucien let go of Soren and walked up to her. "You're forgetting your place here, cow. I can give you a reminder to jog your memory."

"I know my place here. Above you."

Lucien brushed off the insult, getting close to her. "You're gonna look real stupid when I'm the one who's finally above you. Literally and figuratively."

Before Irida could respond, the doors opened. Her heart almost leapt into her mouth as Valentia's enormous form was slowly pushed in by her manservants.

Her expression betrayed no emotion. It was how she always looked. Composed, cool, and above-it-all. Even though the city was going to shit right outside her doorstep.

The group fell into silence as she was slowly pushed to the center of the room and situated to look over them.

"So there he is. Soren Dev." Valentia purred.

"Was starting to think everyone forgot my name." Soren scoffed. "What? Are you gonna offer me money to work with you? A fancy house maybe? Women? "

"I'm not offering anything." Val noted. "This isn't a working relationship, Dev. You have no choice but to obey us."

"Val, please. Let him-!"

Irida was interrupted by a single, silencing hand from the matriarch. Valentia simply turned her head to look at Irida. It was cold, devoid of any warmth she'd expected from Lady Belladonna. There weren't even any words for her.

Just a glare.

"Try and make me." Soren spat.

Valentia smiled. "Those cuffs you're wearing are made of pure Nullstone. Your magic will not work so long as they restrain you. You aren't the Firewalker anymore. You're just Soren."

"Is that so bad?" he asked.

She raised an eyebrow. "Perhaps not for you, since you're delusional enough to think you have a life outside of this."

"Do you?" Soren mocked. "I imagine there's not much life for someone who can't get out the front door."

The room fell silent again. Lucien grabbed Soren by the hair, but Valentia raised her hand again.

"I expected this much resistance. You can put on a front as much as you wish, Dev. I have my methods." Valentia's gaze turned to Irida.

She immediately straightened, a gesture that was practiced by this point. "L-Lady Belladonna."

"What happened to you?" Valentia asked, turning her head up in what appeared to be concern.

"I intercepted a Nullstone dart fired by the Marrow Syndicate. Before this mission, I had a mishap with my magic, and it led to this." She looked downwards. "I... I can't revert back. My magic doesn't work."

"I suppose it wouldn't. Nullstone when injected into the veins directly snuffs out magic." Valentia mused, gazing at her nails. "This Nullstone dart, I imagine it was developed from the small fragments of dust you left behind?"

Irida paled.

"Y-Yes."

"So your predicament is because of your own failings. I'm glad you stepped in the way of the bullet. You made up for your failure."

"What?! Milady, I..." she trailed off, her voice dying out, before returning in a broken squeak. "You're glad?"

"If it weren't for you, Soren Dev would've been hit by it, no? I doubt the Marrow would take aim at anybody other than him."

Soren looked at Irida in surprise, as she could only steel herself and try not to break down in front of everyone. "Y-yes. You're right. But... I still can't use my magic."

"I know."

"...And?"

"There is no 'and'." Valentia stated. "You've served your purpose, Irida. Thank you for your service."

Her heart broke at those words. She was expecting them, but hearing them spoken by Valentia truly destroyed her. The one person she had left in her life who she could call a friend. A loved one. Family.

"I understand." Irida muttered.

"There's more to that story, Lady Belladonna," Lucien stepped forward. "She not only cannot use her magic anymore, but has committed treason against us."

"Treason?"

"I was the one who subdued the Firewalker. The Mirror failed to accomplish her goal, and was actively working against us. She has caught feelings for the Firewalker. She is a liability in every way."

"I see," Valentia nodded. "I do hope you're telling the truth."

"Look at the culprit, milady. She can't even stop herself from looking guilty."

Valentia hummed, noticing Irida's visible discomfort. "Why?"

"I have no answer. Nothing I say will make up for my betrayal. I'm sorry, Lady Belladonna."

"It doesn't sound like you're sorry for betraying me. It sounds like you're sorry for something else."

Irida took a deep breath. "Please, Val. Let this man go. I promise I'll find some way to make sure he never comes here again. He'll be removed from the equation entirely, and everything can go back to how it was. This doesn't have to end in bloodshed."

"It already has." Valentia coldly stated. "Soren Dev's existence here has led to catastrophic property damage and loss of our forces. Damage that will significantly dent our resources."

"But fuck the people, right?" Soren interrupted. "You couldn't care less about them."

Valentia's gaze shifted to Soren.

"You're all the same. You, and those puppets you call the government. It's all about the money. The people are replaceable. You don't give a shit about Tomaso, who brought his daughter Lucia to a magic show despite missing work. You don't give a shit about Bianca, who lives alone and is slowly going blind while the city does nothing to help. You don't give a shit about Tarek, who makes the best candied apples I've ever had!" Soren exclaimed.

The matriarch was clearly unamused by his rant. "You made friends."

"I didn't just get to know them. I *care* about them. Their lives are at risk out there because of me. I'm not even from here, yet I care about them far more than you."

"Caring about individuals is easy, Soren Dev. My job is difficult. Civilian casualties are unfortunate, yes, but they're bound to happen. True peace requires many sacrifices along the way." Valentia purred. "Their lives will be payment for your service in maintaining peace."

"You don't want peace. You want silence."

"Peaceful people are silent."

Irida looked on at the conversation. The words leaving Valentia's mouth hurt her even more than her rebuking of her. The death and destruction going outside was... 'bound to happen'?

Their lives were payment?

Her world came crashing down, reality hitting her like a splash of water to the face. This wasn't the cause she thought she was fighting for. She'd just been too delusional to see it.

"Lady Belladonna, you can't be serious!"

"I am." Valentia turned back to Irida. "Your inability to contain Soren Dev sooner has led to this war. Your betrayal of the Belladonna cause is what resulted in this disaster. A disaster I now need to navigate."

Tears fell down Irida's face.

"Don't you dare try to- AGH!" Soren was interrupted by Lucien, who slammed his face into the floor.

"Wait your turn."

Two guards approached Irida, grabbing her arms, putting her in cuffs. "V-Val, what is-?"

"You're far more useful to me alive than dead, Irida. Clearly, you've successfully seduced Soren Dev, even if it came at the cost of your own loyalty." Valentia explained. "So you'll be kept with the Belladonna. To motivate Soren. Make sure he does as he's told."

Irida looked up at Valentia in horror. "Val, no. This isn't right. Don't do this. Please!"

"What is it with your family and your inability to listen? First, you inherit your mother's... gauche fashion sense. And now you resist. Just like her."

"... What?"

Valentia's eyes flicked to Irida's own. She sighed. "I hadn't wanted to tell you this. But now, given that you're useless to me, I suppose it wouldn't hurt to give up my last bit of leverage."

Valentia leaned forward slightly, the motion taking considerable effort on her part and causing her bed to creak. "Your mother wasn't killed by the Marrow Syndicate. Giulia Isabella was killed by my forces."

"You... killed my mother?"

"Not personally. But yes, I issued the command. You must understand, Irida. I'm trying to maintain peace. Giulia was not only converting the Roseveil District into her own queendom, but was planning on trying to challenge my peace. Negotiations failed, and I had her killed. She simply didn't listen."

"How is that peace?" Irida asked.

"You don't need to understand. I offered so much to her. All I needed in exchange was her service. Her magic would change the game for me. She herself was too old to be an asset. But her daughter? One who'd retained her magic? She could help me secure peace across the city. She stubbornly refused to give you up, despite her clear lack of care for you. A foolish woman, driven only by emotion."

"You didn't save me. You stole me. You killed my mother and took me as an asset."

"A realization made too late." Valentia waved her fan. "You're only what I decide you are. Because underneath that, what else is there?"

Valentia had never cared about her. No one ever had. Her mother, as horrible as she was, was gone too. No one was left.

No friends. No family. No one.

She *was* no one. Just another tool to manipulate Soren. That's all she was. A tool.

Underneath it all, there was nothing.

*"Live the way you want to live."*

How did she want to live? She didn't know. What was the answer supposed to be if she didn't know?

"I don't know," she muttered.

"Hm?"

Irida looked up at Valentia.

"I don't know what else there is." Irida spoke. "But I'm done letting you answer for me."

She still had something. Something real. Something she built.

Her connection to Soren. He'd given her a gift yesterday. A gift she didn't have the heart to take out of her rucksack. A gift she thought meant nothing.

Her cuffed hands reached into her rucksack, pulling out the bottle of sparks. She had to get them to Soren before they were intercepted, the sparks that'd return to him when freed.

"What are you doing?" Valentia asked.

If Irida was able-bodied, this would've been easy. But with her giant breasts, everything got more complicated.

Complicated.

But not impossible.

She undid the cork of the bottle, flicking it above her head. The eyes of the people in the room were drawn to the bottle she'd just thrown into the air. She had to act quickly. Lucien made a beeline for her.

She leapt up, heaving her chest upward. Her enormous breasts bounced into the bottle, hitting it and sending it flying over to her target.

"SOREN!"

He looked up, smirking as the multi-coloured sparks came flying out of the bottle towards him. He put his cuffs in the way of the sparks, as they collided with the Nullstone and created a bright burst of light.

Valentia gasped, shielding her eyes as the dust cleared.

Soren's orange eyes lit up, as he flexed his hands.

The Firewalker was here.

"Contain him!" Valentia commanded as guards attacked the mage. Loud bursts of Soren's magic shook the foundation of the room.

"What the hell is- AUGH!" Lucien yelled as Irida kicked him right between the legs, causing him to crumple to the ground.

"Get me out of here!" Valentia hissed at her manservants, who tried to push her bed out of the skirmish. Irida noticed it immediately.

She may not have been as strong as she once was, but this was still her body. These were still her legs. She refused to let anyone else define what she could or couldn't do.

She kicked one manservant in the neck, causing him to choke as she swept his legs. Another one charged at her, but she leapt over him, putting her cuffs around his neck and pulling, allowing her to break the chain.

She stumbled forward, her chest a heavy counterweight. However, she'd expected this. She'd been dealing with this long enough to finally understand how to adapt to her new body. She used the momentum to rush the third, smacking him upside the chin with her bountiful assets.

The last manservant charged at her, but she used Soren's sash to whip him right in the face, before kicking him into the bedframe.

Valentia was now stranded. Immobile. Her massive body sat on her bed helplessly, as she was sweating up a storm. She groaned, trying to move herself but failing miserably. The black and red robes were now displaced, spilling over her engorged form. The numerous bits of jewelry adorning her body slapped against it as if to resist her.

"Hngh!" she wheezed before panting. "I need reinforcements! Someone!"

Irida stepped onto her bed. Valentia looked at her, her usually composed face now red with exertion.

"I loved you. You were *everything* to me."

"We can come to an agreement. So long as you prove yourself here, we can-"

"You threw it all in my face once I stopped being useful to you." Irida coldly silenced the matriarch.  
"Valentia. You're useless to me. I don't need you anymore."

Valentia's eyes showed a hint of fear. She was too proud to beg, even when reduced to such a pitiful state. Irida pulled the last knife from her rucksack, only for the doors to burst open.

"The Firewalker's free! Get him!"

More Belladonna soldiers.

"If anyone lays a finger on him, Valentia Belladonna dies!" Irida declared. "None of you move!"

The guards all stopped in their places, as Soren turned back to look at Irida. She smiled at him.

"Run, Soren. Get out of here."

Soren chuckled. "Nah. I won't."

"What?! You can't be serious! Run! I'm holding them off!"

"But do you want to?"

"That doesn't matter."

"It does." Soren got serious. "Do you want to hold them off while I escape?"

She clicked her tongue and sighed. "I... don't."

In the blink of an eye, Soren blipped towards her, grabbing her into his arms.

"Whoa!"

Soren looked at Valentia, smirking. "How long has it been since we let some fresh air in here?"

Valentia paled. "You can't be-"

Soren looked up and pointed a finger at the roof, firing a rocket. The rocket drilled through the Belladonna complex. It sparked and fizzled, but it excavated all the dirt and stone above them.

"Holy shit!" Irida gasped as the foundations of the Palazzo shook. The rocket burrowed out of the floor and into the sky, exploding into a crimson firework.

Valentia's room started to collapse as she looked around. "Get me out of here! Now!"

Soren flew up through the hole with Irida in his arms, as they flew into the moonlit sky together. Irida clutched onto him tightly, shutting her eyes initially.

"You can open them."

Irida did as he asked, looking up at him and letting out a tearful smile. "You're the biggest idiot I've ever seen."

"Takes one to know one."

The two looked down at the still ensuing carnage below as Soren flew to a low rooftop.

"What are you going to do?" Irida asked. "This doesn't look like it's going to stop any time soon."

"These assholes murdered innocent civilians." Soren's jaw tightened. "All because of me."

She hugged him. "It's not your fault."

"When you're as strong as I am..." Soren trailed off. "It's always your fault."

"No," she stated. "It's our fault. We'll deal with it together. If they want you so badly, give them exactly what they want."

She pulled back, giving him a kiss to the cheek.

Soren blushed, giggling sheepishly. "W-Well-"

He was interrupted as a blinding orange light crashed into him so fast that Irida didn't even have time to register what it was.

"Soren!" she yelped.

The light blitzed towards her, stopping in front of her. As her eyes adjusted, she noticed the face grinning at her.

"Surprised to see me?" Lucien grinned.

"What the hell did you do to yourself?" Irida asked. "Your magic was never this powerful."

"Eternite is a wonderful thing. The boss gave me some juice to hunt the both of you down and obliterate you."

Irida's eyes roamed his form. He was so hot that he'd burned through his clothes. "I'm surprised that a kick to the dick hurt you. There's barely anything down there."

Lucien's eyebrow twitched. "YOU FUCKING BITCH!"

He prepared to attack, but Irida smirked, having bought just enough time for Soren to recover, grabbing Lucien by the face and flying up into the air. Sparks trailed off him like comets trailing through the sky and creating beautiful patterns.

"You juiced yourself up for this, huh?" Soren asked.

"I'm on your level now, Sparky! Your magic is nothing. I'll show you!"

Soren cracked his knuckles. "I don't get to really show off often. But you, you can take it, can't you? Let's put on a show!"

The two headed further upwards, engaging in battle. Irida was transfixed at the fight amongst the stars, because it wasn't much of a battle.

It was a show.

Soren cackled, zipping across the night sky as sparks flew off him, turning into enormous fireworks. Explosions of every colour peppered the night sky, turning the dark expanse of Navara into a beautiful canvas of colour.

The two mages zipped through the air, their every clash lighting the heavens, creating loud booms as they collided.

Lucien was the harsher, orange light, firing desperate beams of flame to try and tag Soren, only for him to zip around so fast that he created patterns in the air, which exploded into a complex mix of shades.

Irida noticed the fighting slowly stopping, as more and more of the mages looked at the sky and noticed the commotion.

What was once a war being waged at Navara slowly turned into a silence of pure awe, entranced by the dance of fireworks taking place in the clouds. Marrow Syndicate and Belladonna Family no longer mattered. The mages were now no different from the panicking civilians, who now poked their heads out of their hiding spots.

This was peace. A loud, chaotic, yet beautiful peace.

As they clashed midair, a presence made itself known behind Irida.

"Irida." Séverine snapped. "You did this!"

"Isn't it beautiful?" she asked.

Séverine grimaced, her hands glowing. "You'll be the end of this city! *He'll* be the end of this city!"

"Do you really believe that, Séverine?" Irida asked.

Séverine fired at her. Irida ducked before using Soren's sash to block the shots. Séverine scoffed, charging at Irida and kicking the red cloth out of her hands. "Cloth interwoven with chain mail. Cute."

Irida staggered back, now topless in the cool night air. Her nipples immediately hardened, as she gasped softly, trying to cover herself. "Nn..."

"How obscene." Séverine muttered. "You dare to resist despite looking like that? Like a joke?"

"Shut up. I didn't choose this," Irida fired back. "Besides, these boobs are a part of me now. A part of me that's just as dangerous as the rest."

"What could you possibly mean- BWAH!"

Séverine was interrupted by a splash of milk hitting her in the face. As the white liquid dripped down her chin, she looked at Irida as if she'd just killed her family. "Y-y-you...!"

Her cheeks went red, as she wiped off the milk, sputtering and cursing. "What the *fuck* are you doing, you pervert?!"

"Distracting you, dumbass!" Irida rushed towards Séverine, preparing to punch her. Séverine leaned back, but Irida's pendulum-like bust acted as a second fist, smacking Séverine in the cheek, knocking her back. Irida then kicked her in the gut hard, sending her tumbling off the roof to the ground. "Stay down."

Séverine grunted, staring up at the night sky. "You're horrible."

"And I won." She sighed, cradling the breast she'd just shot milk out of. It definitely hurt, but the feeling of not just letting it out, but beating Séverine with it made up for the pain in spades. She picked up the sash, tying it back around her chest. She gingerly hopped down to the ground.

Suddenly, Soren and Lucien crashed right in front of her, as Soren stood over Lucien. "Had enough?"

Lucien, his face contorted in fury, tried to push Soren off. "Why won't you die?!"

Irida then noticed something. On Lucien's right, two girls were huddled near a collapsed building. Irida recognized the two girls. They were the twins. The twins she'd seen going to Soren's magic show.

Soren noticed them as well.

Unfortunately, so did Lucien. He grinned, his hand charging with flames. He used his other hand to blast Soren back.

"Shit!" Irida jumped down. "Séverine! Help me!"

"I'd rather die."

"This isn't about our stupid turf wars anymore, Séverine! I'm trying to take down the Belladonna too. You want this city to be quiet so bad, then get the hell up and do something about it!" Irida yelled. "Please. For the sake of our home."

Séverine went quiet, and then scoffed, firing her blue bolts at Lucien, distracting him long enough for Irida to run over to the kids and grab them, tackling them out of the way of Lucien's blast.

"Are you two okay?" she asked.

The two girls nodded, tears in their eyes. "Mhm! Y-you're that miss we met at the magic show that day, right?"

She smiled. "Yep. And you know the man who's fighting right now?"

The girls looked at Soren.

"It's Soren the Magician!"

Irida smiled. "That's right. Cheer for him, he's about to do his greatest trick."

"GO SOREN!"

"SHOW US YOUR BEST MAGIC TRICK!"

Soren looked at the three and smiled. "You heard 'em Matchstick!"

He grabbed Lucien, who grunted. "Huh? W-Wait, no!"

"I'm Soren the Magician. And for my final trick..."

He took to the air. Lucien panicked.

"Let go of me! STOP!"

"I'm gonna make you disappear!"

Soren flew so fast he turned into a golden comet, Lucien's orange body glowing brighter and brighter as he burnt up in the sky, his screams echoing throughout Navara.

Irida couldn't see the rest of Navara, but she felt it. She heard it. People were cheering, clapping, and whooping. They were celebrating.

Everyone in the city was looking at one thing. She could see even Séverine watching Soren rise slowly into the air like a rocket.

Sparks formed around Soren, spinning around him before streaking across the sky in intricate patterns.

The mage pulsed through the middle of the pattern, before exploding in a light so vibrant that it resembled the sun, lighting Navara's darkened districts.

The blast spread throughout the night sky, turning into smaller sparks that themselves exploded into a rainbow of beauty.

One spark shot towards her, as Soren made himself known, picking her up and taking her into the air.

The two smiled at each other as more sparks flew off Soren, turning into their own bursts of light.

"Did I earn another kiss?" he asked.

"Enough for a lifetime."

They kissed again. Two sparks flew out of Soren, exploding into a pink heart that surrounded them. This was a genuine kiss. Not marred by who the world wanted them to be, but who they were.

Irida and Soren. They didn't need to be more.

---

## Epilogue

"God, I'm so tired."

"Try lugging these things around for a whole day."

"Sounds like a challenge."

Irida giggled. Not long after that night's events, Soren had flown her home. As much as she'd have liked to run away from Navara, they still had work to do.

"You really ended up saving me. Even after I broke your trust," she murmured. "Not killing me was one thing, but you didn't need to accept me."

"I was hurt. It sucked that the girl I'd fallen for played with my emotions," he sighed. "But I couldn't be mad at you."

"Why not?"

"Because you told me. Those words you said. That my feelings mattered to you. That what I did and said to you meant something. That's all I've ever wanted to hear," he whispered. "You were willing to risk your life to save me. That's more than anyone's ever done."

"...I'm sorry I couldn't do it sooner."

"You did it at the right time," Soren put an arm around her waist. "We've got a lot to look forward to."

"You've put a huge target on your back, Soren," she smiled. "That show entranced the civvies, yeah, but it was also a flex of power to the gangs. They're going to go after you."

"They can try. But I'm not going anywhere," he smirked. "The show wasn't just for fun. Navara's going to change. And change starts with the people."

"You're so naïve."

"You love it."

"...Valentia's probably still alive." Irida noted. "She's going to be gunning after me."

"You've got a lot of secrets. You're a hot commodity."

"A hot commodity with boobs bigger than her head."

Soren hissed softly. "Yeah, we should do something about that, huh?"

"It can wait." She smiled. "I'm taking my time with it."

"Taking your time to do what?"

"Figure things out. Figure out who I am. What I like and dislike. What I love. This curiosity in myself, it's... intoxicating."

"Does sound fun. I hope I'm on that love list of yours."

"Entry number one, babe."

He rose from her bed, looking out the window. Her home felt a lot cozier with someone to share it with, even if it probably wasn't going to be her home for much longer.

"So. What's first on the to-do list?"

Irida threw his red sash at his face. "Here."

He caught it, looking at her topless form. "Oh."

"Oh, indeed. I haven't been living for myself all that long, but you made me feel amazing in that alleyway today." Irida purred. "I want to feel that again."

"We can go way further than that." Soren grinned.

"You'll be my first." Irida stated. "I'm happy with that."

"I'll make you even happier."

And so, they ended up in bed, fully naked. Irida merely had to discard the remnants of her dress, though she got to bask in Soren's naked form. His ethnic clothing slipped off his lean, sun-kissed body. He was well-muscled, yet still lean. His broad chest flexed as he threw away his shirt, his pecs bouncing ever so subtly with the motion.

The room had felt so cold before, but Irida felt the temperature rise as Soren got close to her. A few scars peppered his body, especially a fresh one inflicted by Lucien, though Soren seemed to ignore it.

His smooth palms touched her cheek as she hummed in pleasure. He got on the bed with her, getting irresistibly close. The scent of saffron felt electrifying to her senses, as she nipped at his jawline. Her hands played with his messy, curly hair as her enormous bust pressed into his chest.

He kissed her neck, as she yelped a few times at the feeling, pulling him further into her embrace as he now lay above her. Her massive breasts spilled out the sides of her as she offered them up to him, her dark peaks already dribbling with milk.

Soren put his hands on them, massaging them and kneading them like dough, as Irida moaned.

"Ahn~ AH! FUCK!"

"Do you want me to slow down?"

"A little." Irida managed. "Let me relish this."

"My bad. Got a little too excited."

"Perv."

Irida gripped the sheets tightly as Soren kissed her breasts, peppering them with his lips and tongue before heading down their expanse. Irida did her best not to kick him away, but her legs convulsed, her thighs rubbing together to relieve herself.

His tongue reached what little was left of her midriff, as he worshipped her abs. She laughed breathlessly at the feeling. "Stop! That tickles!"

"I love me some abs on a woman. You can't blame me for enjoying it."

"I absolutely can, you weirdo. My boobs are begging for you."

"They can wait. I found a new target."

Soren dipped his head down towards her crotch, his fingers slowly rubbing her inner thighs as she let loose a mewl. His head drifted towards her folds, his tongue darting out of his mouth and attacking her clit.

"FUCK, SOREN! THAT FEELS AMAZING!"

He giggled, continuing to pleasure her with his mouth, as she wrapped her legs around his shoulders to push him further inside. He clasped her thighs, squeezing them as Irida squirmed.

"AHHMMPH~!"

She came then and there, her breasts squirting out small streams of milk, Soren coughing as he pulled back. "Wow! That was... a lot."

"Ah... Now hurry up and do something about these." Irida pouted, holding her leaking breasts.

"Yes ma'am."

He crawled up onto her again, before squeezing her breasts, playing with them and stimulating her nipples with his thumb. She gasped sharply, feeling more fluid leak out of her puffy peaks.

Soren reached down, sucking on one nipple.

"S-Soren?!"

"Tastes good!"

He muttered, continuing to suck on them before then moving to the other, servicing both her breasts until they were dry.

"Nngh..." she moaned. "I'm in heaven."

"Mind taking me there with you?" Soren asked, as Irida felt his manhood press heavily into her thigh.

"Mind showing me what we're working with? I wouldn't call myself an expert, but..."

She trailed off as he showed off his fully erect penis. It had girth, and its length far surpassed her expectations. She could see the veins underneath the already dark skin.

"Like what you see?"

"Mhm." Irida said, her hands drifting across his shaft, playing with the tip.

"Mmgh..." he grunted. "You tease."

"You spent enough time teasing me. Can't handle a taste of your own medicine?" She asked, stroking his member sensually.

"Fuck! You're going to be the death of me, Irida!" he moaned, capturing her lips in a kiss. The two moaned into it, as Soren turned her to the side and spooned her from behind.

"What position is this?" Irida asked, before feeling his hands on her enormous breasts again. "Ahh! O-Okay. I see. You want to have your cake and eat it too, huh?"

"Cake sure is the right word," he whispered into her ear, pressing his crotch up against her ass.

His cock slowly went below her rear, as he slowly pushed her down until both her knees were on the mattress. He then slipped it in.

Irida sharply inhaled, gasping as she felt his presence inside her. He began to thrust slowly, while simultaneously groping her boobs from behind.

She gritted her teeth, drooling at the way he made her feel, his grunts and moans echoing into her ears from behind, making her feel secure despite the pleasure-pain shooting throughout her lower body.

She let out noises she'd have deemed horrifically obscene mere days ago. She was free to screech, free to yell out Soren's name with fervor. Free to live.

"SOREN!"

"IRIDA!"

Both of them reached a climax, as she felt Soren fill her up with his cum, as she orgasmed at the same time. The two let out a combined cry of ecstasy, as Soren collapsed beside her.

She slowly turned to him. "How was it?"

"Perfect," he sighed. "In every way."

"I almost want to keep this body, if it'll make me feel this good." Irida giggled.

"More to love."

She nodded. "More to love. I'm just happy they aren't getting any bigger."

"They stopped?"

"Yeah, some time ago." Irida noted. "Someday, we'll get them reduced."

"Someday."

"Thank you, Soren. For everything."

"Irida, c'mon."

"I'm serious." She put a hand on his cheek. "You're so much more than the strongest mage. So much more than even a simple magician. You changed my life in a single day."

"You changed mine too. I don't deserve all the credit."

"I guess not." She smiled. "You talked about how you never get to live your life the way you want to. You saved me Soren. So I'm going to save you too. I'm going to make sure you get to live your life the way you want to."

"You're gonna make me cry."

"You big baby." she chuckled. "I remember sitting here. Only a few days ago, having a panic attack about my face."

"About your face?"

"Just finished a job. I... killed someone for my job." She said, hesitantly. "When I shapeshifted back, I forgot what I looked like. I was so scared that something was off. That maybe if I got it wrong now, that I'd never look the same ever again."

"Does it matter if you look the exact same?"

"It did. It's all I had. It's all Irida was back then. If I didn't look like her, there was nothing else left about her."

"Is it all Irida is now?"

"Not really. I don't mind using a reference. Or asking you. Underneath it all, I'm still me. Still Irida," she smiled. "Irida Isabella."

"Cute."

"Shut up."

"I love you, Irida Isabella."

"I love you too, Soren Dev."

"..."

"Did you just fall asleep?"

Irida sighed, kissing him on the forehead and closing her eyes.

She was okay. That's all that mattered.

---

~ ~ ~