Michele could safely call Shida’s lab a mess. Rats ran rampant all over the floor, bits of charred metal and broken glass were also scattered. Even her prison-like cell wasn’t spared from the mess. A black blade chipped off from its handle sat beside her. She picked it up, ignoring the strange sensation that zipped through her arm upwards. The blade oozed with a strong desire to taste blood, threatening to sink into her skin the moment she touched it. She wrapped it in a thick cloth, shoving it into her bloody dress when a soft thud broke the silence.

“Yes, sir,” a husky voice said, echoing in the small tunnel of the dungeon.

A silhouette of a man wearing a breastplate and a cape formed before her. As the shadow receded, a man with unruly brown hair approached her. A wicked smile surfaced on his face as they locked in their stares at one another.

“Good morning, Miss Michele,” he greeted, unlocking the door for her.

“What do you want, Ryuuga?”

“Lively as always, eh, Michele? That’s good. Because I am your facilitator and I will assist you to become someone way more powerful than what you are now.”

“I didn’t ask for it, twerp. But thanks for the gift,” a smirk dashed across her face.

“Well said. I kind of like you already. Not like some pseudo knight that claims he does not need power. Follow me. You know what will happen if you don’t.”

The phrase “pseudo knight” rings a bell. She glanced at the cloth holding onto the black blade, an image of Klavier pulling out his broken sword rampaged in her mind. He couldn’t have referred to Klavier in that sense, or did he?

Ryuuga led her into the main facility of Shida’s lab. It was by no means a comfortable trip - it stunk of rotting flesh and the air was full of agonizing noises. As they made their way down a spiral stairway, she caught sight Will, Aem and Amy chained at one corner, their heads bobbing about slightly that made them look a little zombie-like. Michele heaved a sigh so loud that it provoked Ryuuga’s attention.

“You know,” Michele said. “You could tell me what’s going on already.”

“You’ll find out soon enough.”

“I don’t like to wait.”

“Shut!” he bellowed right at her face. “Up...okay. Don’t ask, just follow.”

“Ooo, I’m so scared. So, is that all a death threat can do?”

“I swear, if not for Shida’s orders, I’ll tear you into ribbons right here, right now.”

“Man, you’re boring. Come on, lead me to your playhouse already.”

“Ah, so good to see you alive and kicking, miss Michele,” Shida said as they moved towards an encased area of the lab where he sat down pushing buttons at seemingly random points on a huge board in front of him.

“It’s my pleasure to be at your service,” a wicked smile emerged on her face.

“Now if you’ll excuse us,” Shida glanced at Ryuuga. Ryuuga gestured a gentle bow, leaving promptly without question. “Miss Michele, I believe you know why you’re important for this project.”

“I kind of forgot. Mind telling me you grandfather story?”

“As you wish. I do apologize for the stench outside, I’ve been working with a couple of magicians to attempt recreating life. Or in more simple terms, to summon the dead.”

“You perked my interest already. Go on, I’m listening.”

“It takes a great deal of magic to do this sort of thing. Some even died trying to achieve it for the power they forcibly wield is far too great to handle. So, in these little experimentations of mine, I want to make us stronger to be able to handle the strains of this unknown feat.”

“Blah blah blah,” she stuck out her tongue. “So basically you want to make me a ‘Summoner’, eh?”

“Correct. I offered this opportunity to another person but he blew my lab up instead.”

“I see. I wouldn’t want to be that kind of jerk. So, go on, equip me with the things you need me to have.”

“Such enthusiasm. I like you already.”

“Psst Michele, can you hear me?” a voice whispered in her ear.

“Oh, it’s Themis, isn’t it?” she thought out loud as she tapped on her ear.

“Are you okay there? I heard the rest are still injured.”

“Oh yeah, sure, we’re fine. Themis, I’m going to be a Summoner.”

“Oh. A Summoner. What? A Summoner? Why the heck did you agree with that?”

“That’s my only option available if I don’t want to end up like those lab rats of Shida’s.”

“How long do we have?”

“Hold on. I’ll ask him,” she turned her attention to Shida. “Um, if I may ask, sir. How long does this procession last?”

“Three days,” Shida answered.

“You heard that right, Themis?” she returned to her own internal thought.

“Three days eh. We don’t have much time. I would normally rely on Will to bail me out in these kinds of situations…”

“Look. Your knight is out cold somewhere in this lab. There’s no way he can bail us out. What about that boy Klavier?”

“What? You want to mobilize that rogue knight to do the job?”

“Just do it. He might have what it takes. To get us out that is.”

“O-Okay, I’ll try… stay in touch okay?”

“Sure.”

“Miss Michele,” Shida said. “Now that I have your agreement, I would like to begin the process. It’s broken down to three stages…”

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A flash of light dashed across his eyes. The black-purple haired kid collapsed to her knees, clutching her stomach as she writhed in pain.

“I’ll admit you’re good,” he said, resting the blade on his elbow, its back edge sinking into his skin slightly for blood to escape. “But you’ll need to focus a lot more if you’re going to match yourself to a true demon.”

“Don’t insult me,” she stood up, lifting her scythe off the sandy ground. “I’m not done yet.”

“That’s the spirit,” he raised his sword. “Show me what you’ve got, Alice.”

Alice took a step forward, raising her scythe up to slightly over head level. Everything around them seemed to fall silent as their eyes locked on one another. Klavier burst forth like a rocket, pummeling his sword down so fast that it was virtually impossible to see it coming. However, Alice proved him wrong, she smashed her weapon against his, releasing a powerful shockwave that shook the ground around them. But that was about all she could do - she staggered from the incredible force so much that she toppled over a loose rock behind her, allowing Klavier to shove her right to the ground. Fear overtook the once emotionless expression on her face as he lunged the blade towards her. But it smashed right into the sand, an inch away from her head.

“Training’s over for today,” Klavier said, pulling the sword up. “You’ve made good progress in that speed of yours. You need to work on maintaining that balance no matter how hard the clash is.”

“Well done, Alice,” the king emerged from the shadows as the environment dismantled to its original metal confines. “I’ll see you two back in the dining room for dinner.”

“Yes sir,” he bowed, watching Alice walk out of the room with the king.

“Good evening, Klavier,” Elza’s voice shook him. “What’s with the long face?”

“N-Nothing much,” he sheathed his white sword, following Elza out of the facility and back to the massive palace.

“I see.”

“Anyway, I noticed that you won’t show yourself when I mingle with Alice. Is something going on between you two?”

“It’s father. He told me not to reveal my presence to her at all costs.”

“Any reason behind it?”

“Not really.”

“That must kind of suck,” he glanced at the floor.

“Why’s that?” she raised her eyebrows.

“Um…” he scratched his head. “Don’t you want to see the world?”

“Of course! But it’s all about wars around here and as the second princess, it’s not going to be easy to get out of here.”

They continued on with their conversation as they walked down the heavily trafficked hallway. Countless eyes were on them, the servant’s internal thought as obvious as them telling Klavier their desire to kill him. It could be the way how Elza was so lively around him. But the bliss he could give her with his companionship could only last so long. After all, it was never his intention to stay in the palace and live a comfortable life.

Klavier walked up the tower, glancing at his back just to make sure that Elza wasn’t following him. He needed a plan to escape and fast now that his body was starting to get used to the lifestyle the royalties led. He shut the door behind him, unfolding the thick and long scroll on the table that revealed the blueprints of the palace and the immediate residences around it.

In it indicated all the possible routes he could take to make an escape. Many were heavily guarded with the royal soldiers which had the capability of destroying mortal, not because of their peerless swordsmanship but more of the small hand cannon they carried around on their waist. He witnessed its power to kill a mortal with just the pull of the trigger even if they wore heavy plated armor on. He crossed out the routes guarded by those knights, leaving only two options available.

“Ugh… hey Klavier, can you hear me?”

“Themis. I was about to contact you,” he thought out loud. “I’m thinking about a way to get out of this place but I require your opinion.”

“Well, looks like we’re on the same page. Okay, so let’s see what you have.”

He described the two paths open for him, the dangers behind each one of them - down the zip line to the roofs of the neighboring hovels or by jumping down an epic number of meters off the garden outside the tower.

“Hmm… if it’s me, I’d probably take the zip line. Wait. Do you know how to run through a zip line?” Themis asked.

“Um, yeah. I’ve got two swords that can support me.”

“That broken sword isn’t going to help you much. We’ve got up to three days to pull it off. So we’d better be quick.”

“Why three days?”

“Because Michele is going to become Shida’s guinea pig to this thing called ‘summoning’.”

“What? Seriously?”

“Yeah. She’ll be fine. I think she’s just playing along with Shida to appease him.”

“Okay, if you say so. Themis, please coordinate the escape. I’m anticipating that it’ll be a high profile one.”

“Oh. Okay. Make sure to get on horseback if you intend to get out of this place within an hour. You know how to ride a horse, right?”

“Um… I’ll figure a way around it.”

“Michele’s an idiot to count on an idiot like you, you know that? You’ve got three days to get it right. So it’s victory or death.”

Themis’s words sunk into his head. There was no way he learn such a skill over such a short time. Or was there? He peeked out of the window, staring at the stables just below the garden. The tips of his lips lifted.

Now was to find a distractor since the chances for escape would depend on how good that person did the job. He pulled out a circle emblem that had the symbol of fire from his pocket, joining his hands together as he chanted a spell under his breath. As if materializing out of thin air, an orange-haired man wearing a largely black armor stepped out of the magic circle. Traces of beige fur peeked out of his pauldrons and along the lines of his cloak, his sclera somewhat black.

“To think that I’ve been summoned by a human,” his eyes narrowed. “What do you wish from me, Summoner?”

“I believe you know who I am,” Klavier smirked.

“D-uh. I kicked your ass, and you kicked mine just a couple of days ago. I still can’t believe I lost though.”

“Luther, this is important. Please don’t tell anybody that I’m a Summoner, okay? Now, the reason why I brought you here is to ask for your help. You see, I’m in a pinch right now.”

“Go on,” he folded his arms.

“I need to find Vanros Klavier, but the king of this empire will not let me go until I train this kid called Alice.”

“So you intend to escape knowing they’ll be after your head.”

“That’s the point. To reduce that certainty, I’m going to need to count on you. So, here’s the plan…”

Klavier filled Luther in with his thoughts about how the operation was supposed to be done.

“Hmm… interesting. Get Zellha on the line. I think she’ll be interested,” Luther said.

“Can I count on you to brief her? They will call me in anytime.”

“Anything you say,” he waved a goodbye as his body faded into the environment.

“Klavier,” Elza’s voice pierced through the door. “Is anybody in there?”

“U-Um, no, milady! What’s the matter?”

“You’re making the king wait.”

“Crap.”