There was something different about Klavier’s way of playing the piano. It sounded more soulful, mixed with melancholy and hope stirred together with a cello and a violin into a piece of coherent music that took her mind into a parallel universe. Memories reeled in her mind’s eye, reminiscing the moments of Alice’s birth and the new desire that burned within to protect the infant. Her vision started to distort like she was looking through a body of water. She blinked, wiping the tears off her eyes fast enough before Klavier turned around. He raised his eyebrows as their stares locked on each other for a split second.

“Did something happen?” he said with a gentle grin.

“I just remembered something, that’s all.”

“Must be a bitter one,” he stashed the white sword on his waist as he rose from his seat.

“No, not really. But still, I wished that father would allow me to show myself to her…”

“You mean Alice?”

“Yeah,” her eyes lit with a hint of enthusiasm.

“The time will come.”

“But how can that happen without father ever knowing?”

“He doesn’t need to know.”

“What?”

“He doesn’t *need* to know about it,” he turned his back on her, walking out of the piano room before she could throw anymore questions at him.

She wasn’t about to let him get away with her question left unanswered like that. She dashed towards the exit, reaching out for Klavier when a beam of light flashed on her. The environment around her turned bloody, shadows of soldiers charging into battle only to be slaughtered by human-like creatures that wielded unearthly powers. In the carnage was a platinum-haired man, the solidness in his grey eyes shown nothing more apart from the desire of the widespread destruction. On his hand was a greatsword whose guard resembled that of angel wings. He stared right back at her, mouthing the words “The end is near” before charging towards her at an inhuman speed akin to teleporting.

Elza awoke abruptly, the aftershocks of the dream replaying in her mind. He wasn’t about to disappear just when Bariura Empire needs him, would he? No, it was a very real possibility. After all, she was the one who took him from Themis’s care against his will. She tossed herself out of the bed, donning her battle equipment, picking the scythe that leaned against the wall and stormed out of the room. She zipped through the countless pathways and flight of stairs, unable to shake off the cryptic message he sent in that dream.

The air around her started to feel heavy as she approached Klavier’s room. It couldn’t have been that gravity decided to pull her down harder. Rather, it seemed like there was an intruder, a very strong one for that person to release an aura that threatened to smother her. She lightened her footsteps, keeping her body low as she snuck up towards the top of the tower when she noticed an orange haired man stand in front of Klavier’s room with his arms folded. She leaned against the wall, studying his movements but all he did was yawn or dig his ear with his black claws. Perhaps he wasn’t a dangerous person-

“Hmph, you’re the first person who dares to stalk me,” his voice reverberated in her ears, sending shock waves that shook her to the core. “Second Imperial Princess, Elza.”

“Who are you?” she withdrew from her hiding, clenching the handle of her scythe.

“Your worst nightmare. Pfft, that was cheesy. Maybe I should try another one.”

“You’d best leave, stranger. Do so and your life will be spared.”

“Oh? If you’re gonna spare my life, then what about Klavier’s?”

“What?”

“You heard me right. What. About. Klavier’s?” his black sclera and red irises piercing through her.

“You,” she pulled her weapon out. “What did you do to him?!”

“Woah,” he raised his hands. “I didn’t do nothing to him. I’m just a *god* loitering around here minding my own business. Oh, in case you don’t know, my name is Luther, not ‘you’.”

“Get out of here, or else.”

“Or else what? Cut through me? No can do, milady.”

Elza zapped through him, putting all the anger into a single strike as she swung the scythe with her all. Most enemies would either dive away from it or get slain. But Luther did neither of them - he raised his arm, blocking the attack by the wrist. The overwhelming force ought to throw him off. But no, he stood firm on his ground. A smirk surfaced on his formerly poker face. He clenched his fist, throwing a lightning quick punch to the face that sent her sliding across the floor. She wiped the blood off her mouth, spitting out a molar tooth.

“I like those eyes,” Luther said. “Ready to go all out? Because I’m waiting.”

“Shut it,” she raised her scythe.

“You don’t really understand the situation, do you? In case you don’t know, I was the one who destroyed half the capital, leaving Klavier and his friends at the state they were. If it takes that many people to stop me, what makes you think you can stop me alone?”

“Hmph, don’t get so full of yourself, boy,” she loosened her footing. “The empire don’t call me Inferno Elza for nothing. I’ll take you out single-handedly, I promise you that.”

“Let’s see *if* you can,” he stomped on the floor, the sound rippling across the palace that shook the stillness of the night.

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“Klavier! That’s the signal!” Themis shouted in his mind. “Go! Elza must not find you!”

“I’m on it,” Klavier said, dashing across the rooftop of the highest point in the palace, pulling out both swords from their scabbards.

He leapt into the air, joining the blades together into an “X” as he hooked onto the thick metal line that led him down to the residences just outside the palace. He tumbled across the roof, dissipating the excessive force that could break his legs with the hard landing before diving further down to the stables, taking cover in a hay bale when a group of guards patrolling the area came over to investigate the noise source.

He dropped his hand onto the handle of his white sword as the guards closed in to his hiding spot. One of them stepped forward, wielding a spear to poke onto the hay bale when Klavier pulled the sword out with so much speed that it appeared like a flashbang that momentarily dazed them. He bounced out of his hiding, smashing his sword flat on their noses in quick succession. The moment he sheathed his weapon, they collapsed, leaving no chance for them to shout for help. With the obstacles taken care of, he seized a horse from the stables, forcing it into a furious gallop.

“Klavier, come in,” Themis’s voice rung in his head.

“I got a horse,” he thought out loud. “How’s Michele?”

“She’s with me along with the other soldiers. We’re currently riding down the town using a hijacked carriage so we’ll meet you shortly. In the meantime, if you bump into guards, please do not ram them over. They know how to disable horsemen.”

“Okay.”

“Keep going straight. I think I saw you already…”

“Yee-ha!” Michele’s voice shook the air as she cracked the whip. “Come on, you lazy bum, my mom can move faster than you!”

“Michele… you’re not being serious about what you just said, are you?” Klavier’s eyebrow twitched.

“Of course not.”

“Thieves!” a hostile voice shouted from behind. “You won’t get away with this! Pull over right now, the whole lot of you!”

“No way in hell, pal,” Klavier pulled out his white blade. “Themis, we’ve got company.”

“It’s not just one, there’s four behind,” Themis commented.

“Tell me where they are. I haven’t learnt horseback riding well enough to be able to look anywhere just yet.”

“If you say so…erm, to your northwest?”

His mind flashed the moments when he tried to slash a moving target on horseback. It ended in disaster, with him puking halfway through his slash before he bumped onto a wall that nearly split his head into two. With experience being the best teacher, he decided to close his eyes, trusting his other senses to fulfill his needs. He swung his sword across, picking up a small resistance to the motion before a loud, agonizing scream filled the air.

“That’s one down, three more,” Themis said.

“How the hell did you hit somebody with such lousy attacks?” Michele commented.

“Shut it. If you think you’re so good, then do my job.”

“Requesting for support! These men are dangerous!” the town guards shouted, prompting a massive mobilization of the remaining personnel with a ear-splitting siren. Tens of lightly armored militia flocked to block their path, raising their swords against them in full anticipation of their arrival.

“Great, we’ve got pursuers *and* a barricade to go through,” Michele said.

“Hoi,” Themis said. “If we don’t clear them, we’re gonna get disabled and wasted there.”

“Zellha,” Klavier said. “Move in at our location. We need you to clear the path.”

“With pleasure,” a silhouette of a woman overshadowed the moon.

The moonlight shined on the figure, revealing a skimpily dressed lady whose golden hair sparkled brilliantly in the light. Zellha swung her hand across, raining down thousands of white and silver ethereal swords at the makeshift blockade that dispersed the crowd and killed a few. Klavier’s and Michele’s horse blazed past the wreckage, entering into the outer part of the empire.

“Klavier, who was that you called just now?” Michele asked.

“She’s an acquaintance of mine,” he replied.

“Klavier, we’ve yet to lose the other three horsemen,” Themis said. “They closing in to our flanks. Michele, can you take care of the one at your left? I’ll take care of the one behind us.”

“Got it,” Michele pulled an axe out, staring at the guard so intensely that she appeared to lose focus of the route in front of her. She threw the axe, its blade smashing right through the helmet and into the head.

Klavier moved in to the right, clashing swords with the other mounted unit. The apparent inexperience of horseback combat pulled him down - his opponent managed to pierce through his shabby defence, but wasn’t close enough to do more than shallow cuts. Klavier swiped his blade onto the neck of the enemy horse, exerting sufficient power to cause it to stagger and bring his opponent down to the floor.

Themis’s wand protruded out of the carriage door, firing shots of pink light towards the final pursuer. Her opponent dodged the attacks effortlessly, moving in so fast that it momentarily broke her concentration when he tried to slash through the door. Klavier closed in to the opponent, clashing swords with him when Themis unloaded another round. Klavier leaned to the side, barely evading the bolt that found its way to the intended recipient's head that sent him crashing to the floor.

“Hey! I could have hit you!” Themis shouted.

“I thought you needed some help since you’re tiny,” Klavier replied.

“Why you…!”

“Anyway, how far are we from the final destination?”

“Hang in there for another two minutes. I think we’re close.”

“That is assuming we don’t get any hiccups,” Michele said. “You know, I can see the empire is bringing in the bad boys from here.”

“How does it look like?” Klavier asked.

“A house with crazy big wheels.”

“Great, that’s a tank on us.”

“What’s a tank?”

“It’s a house of massive destruction. One shot at us and we’re all dead.”

“Oh. Okay. So. How are we gonna deal with that?”

“Themis, do you know any destructive magic?”

“Nope. I can only shoot holy bolts.”

“What about you, Michele?”

“I can do a certain trick but that’ll require us to stop.”

“Got it,” Klavier brought the horse to a gradual stop. “Get off now. We’re going to fight. Michele, to the front.”

“Got it,” Michele said, bouncing out of the carriage master’s seat.

A reddish aura danced over her brow as she unleashed her all, the range of her attack was so far and wide that it ripped the ground, slashing across the armor of the tank to create countless angry cross marks of various angles. However, the mammoth machine still moved forward at a speed so fast that they didn’t even have a window of time to dodge its incoming attack. Klavier could hear Michele scream desperate instructions to dive away from it, but he paid no mind to it, pulling the broken black sword just on time that brought the metal body to a complete halt without any struggle.

“Bellow, Sirkius,” he mumbled as he slashed its body into half. Michele dropped to her knees as the tank blew up right in front of them, the orange hue of the explosion amplifying the intense bloodlust in Klavier’s brown irises.

“To think that a man could single-handedly stop a monster like that, I must commend you for your strength,” a sinister voice provoked them.

“Good to see you again, Shida,” Klavier held the handle of the white sword this time. “So what’s in store for us?”

“I’m honestly not very sure. I’m here to fetch my experiment, that’s all. I suggest you do not resist.”

“He doesn’t need to,” Michele pointed her axes at Shida. “Because I’m the one who’s going to.”

“Guess it can’t be helped after all. But it’s not like I was expecting it. Alice, Ryuuga, they’re all yours.”

“With pleasure, sir,” Ryuuga said, stepping forward to overshadow Shida. Beside him was the scythe girl, her eyes showing no form of emotion as she stared at Klavier.

“Michele,” Klavier said. “Take care of Alice. I’ll deal with Ryuuga.”

“If you say so,” Michele said, provoking Alice to chase her before she dashed out of sight.

“What is your motive, Ryuuga?” Klavier pulled his white sword out, its back edge gleaming under the moonlight.

“I believe I told you. To purge the world of darkness. The last time I couldn’t kill you off, but there’s nothing to stop me this time.”

“So be it.”