Things ought to go well now. Okay, maybe not with all the destruction done when Zellha was berserk. The authorities naturally found blame on Agent One for not being able to contain her power. They took one step further, making the most unreasonable demand to a mere student - to pay up twenty million zel or face expulsion.

While the huge fee was something to make a fuss out of, it was not all that bad to him. The experiences he had got him to write even more songs in a span of a single day, notably from the tough training with Michele, the intensity of his fear when he fought Zellha and the love that he freely gave away that ultimately calmed her down.

He sat on the bench in front of the piano, testing the arranged music notes he made for himself when he heard the door creaked open.

“What’s up?” Agent One asked as he played on as if he was never disturbed in the first place.

“We’ve been told by Elder Grah about your situation,” Zellha replied. “It’s a huge debt to clear.”

“I’m still finding ways around it but right now, I’ve kinda hit a wall. The school festival is coming up and there’s a lot of preparations needed so I’ll think about it when the event is over.”

“School festival? What’s it about?” Michele asked.

“It’s a once-a-year event held by the school to raise funds for the school activities. We’re quite high profile if you look at it, with the hype of summoning still high in the air and more recently, the need to renovate the destroyed areas,” Zellha looked down on the floor as when he said that. “I’m yet to register for anything significant though.”

“You play the piano, right?” Michele asked. “Why not you do a set of performances?”

Zellha snapped her fingers. “That’s a great idea! You could even get the band to assist you to make excellent music!”

“Heh, even a dumb person can outwit you.”

“Oh?” Zellha smirked, suppressing the obvious desire to laugh. “You finally acknowledge your stupidity.”

“What did you say?”

“Don’t look at me like that. You started it. So, let’s get onto pulling through this proposal,” Zellha shifted her attention to Agent One. “You should submit some of your entries to the band and let them help you play it along with you. Who knows, you might actually get popular that way.”

“I’m not seeking popularity,” he said.

“Humble guy, aren’t you? While you perform out there, I’ll be selling lemonades. They’re a hit even among the gods so you can trust that I can fetch lots of cash.”

“I don’t like the sound of that,” Michele commented. “It sounds almost like you wanna scam people.”

“Do I? Then what do you intend to do to help Agent One? H~mm?”

“I-I don’t know! Don’t look at me like that, it’s creeping me out.”

“Ah, I know. You can do modelling.”

“Modelling?” Agent One asked. “Do you know how tough a job that is?”

“It’s not gonna kill this monkey here. I’ll admit she’s got a good figure but that’s all there is to it.”

“Who are you calling monkey?” Michele’s cheek muscles twitched.

“You.”

“I’m gonna destroy you,” she stood up, pulling out her axes as Zellha scrolled her tongue out.

“Drop it guys,” Agent One stepped in between them, carrying the thick folder of music sheets. “I’ll need you guys to help me decide up to three sets of five songs from four-hundred over pieces here.”

“F-Four hundred?!” Michele’s jaw dropped. “And why three sets when you can settle with one?”

“It’s to maximize my chances of success. If one fails, I can use another to back me up. Zellha, do you mind?”

“With pleasure,” Zellha snatched it, immersing herself into the great flood of content before her.

“In the meantime, I’ll let Elder Grah know about what we agreed on. So, Michele will do modelling, Zellha will sell lemonades and I will give out performances.”

“Cut the modelling,” Michele said.

“Oh, why are you shy to bare that body of yours?” Zellha asked. “It’s not like anyone’s gonna die doing that.”

“You’re the one to talk.”

“What’s there to worry about?” Agent One said, browsing through the job requests. “The modelling is on women’s clothing.”

“Is it?”

“Yeah,” he looked at her. “What kind of modelling were you thinking of just now?”

“N-Nothing-”

“Lingerie modelling,” Zellha snapped, taking pleasure behind Michele’s stoning expression.

“Can you not?!”

“I shouldn’t have asked,” Agent One stumbled in his footsteps.

It was more work than he anticipated. Not only did he need to update Elder Grah on his plan on how to earn twenty million zel within two years, he also had to submit his proposals to the school band and hope that they would help him with it. He had never ventured beyond the classroom before, so that made him a complete nobody thrown into the wilderness to fend for himself. Then again, he wasn’t alone in this ambitious quest; Zellha had armed him with the three sets of five songs for him to show it off to the uncanny wild beast he was about to conquer.

This monster that he was tasked to defeat was known to be quite a mean person among the members that Agent One talked to, mainly because of her piercing insults and apparent lack of recognition among people who were achieving results. But rumours would remain rumours; he took a step forward by appointing a time with the band leader using Karl to help him. But he chose a rather inconvenient time since it was after a long and hard practice session.

“Seria, do you have a moment?” Karl asked. “My friend’s got a request.”

“What does he want?”

“Seria,” Karl said. “This is Agent One. Agent One, this is Seria.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Agent One stretched his hand out for a handshake only for her to shove it aside.

“What brings you, a nobody, here?”

“I’ve got a couple of music pieces here that I thought might be great to share with you guys. You see, not all of these that I have need to be played solo. Is it alright if you let me show it to you?”

“I’m not really against it, but my guys are already really tired from the practice. Come another day.”

“But-”

“Seria,” Karl interrupted Agent One. “Agent One really needs this chance. He’s got a debt to clear with the school.”

“And why should I care?”

“Because,” Karl’s eyes drifted to Agent One. “He’s the one who managed to stop the destruction of the stadium single-handedly.”

“H~uh? What makes you think I will believe such an obvious lie?”

“We’ll just put it this way,” Agent One said. “I’m in debt with the school for a very good reason. And if I don’t get the money before graduation, I’ll get expelled on the day of graduation itself. I can’t do this alone, so I’m appealing to this band because I find that you guys are approachable.”

“A-As if compliments like that will help us,” she folded her arms. “Fine. I’ll let you give us a preview.”

Agent One pulled out a thin book, laying out the music sheets onto the piano as the band members gathered at one point to make themselves comfortable. He ignored the daggers poking him on the back as he positioned his fingers as where the instructions told him to. He pressed down on the first note, his mind flashing the image of the last time he held his father’s hand. It happened when he ventured with his father down the Lake Lordahn in Lizeria. They went around the lake, collecting herbs that would be useful for the physicians back in town when a man wearing a set of beautiful white armor descended on the lake.

“Um, dad,” Agent One said. “I don’t think we should go there.”

“Hold on, it might be an injured person. Stay right here, I’ll be back,” his father replied as he took a closer look.

Without warning, a beam of light shot through him. The shock reflected on his father’s face, frozen completely as he collapsed from the blow. The shout he made as a child transformed into a powerful blast of tragic music as it reached its peak. It was ironic; he wanted to forget about all these because it tore him apart just recalling it. But there was a strange energy surrounding his fingertips, almost as though those painful images were the ones that drove the song forward. As he slowed the pace to a stop, his ears pricked at the sound of sniffing within the crowd. He turned around, his eyes capturing the tearful faces among his audience.

“I-I’m not crying!” Seria insisted as she blew her nose on a tissue paper.

“So, how was it?” Agent One asked.

“N-Not good enough! Show me one more!”

He shrugged, sitting down on the bench in front of the piano once more as he moved on to the next piece. He laid out the positions, staring hard at the title of the song before launching into an explosive start. The memories reeled in, continuing from where it left off.

“Dad! Dad!” Agent One cried as he nudged the corpse before him.

But he did not move a single muscle even as Agent One poked at his sensitive spots. There wasn’t a pulse at all and small pool of blood formed around him so much that it stained Agent One’s knees. His mouth dried as the reality sunk in his head. Tears rolled down his cheeks as the grief within flowed in. But the sadness turned into rage the moment his eyes set on the shiny armored figure. He pulled out a knife in his pocket, approaching it as stealthily as possible when it dashed past him with a speed that appeared impossible for a typical human. He turned around, staring right back at the figure moving towards his village. He picked up the tempo as he recalled his past self bursting in a sprint.

“Mom! Sis! Get out of there!” he screamed at the top of his lungs when he toppled over a boulder, skinning his knees in the process.

But his warning came too late - the armored figure had already begun its carnage, setting ablaze the houses, slaughtering the panicked villagers with a single thrust of its dual-tipped spear. He fell to his knees, watching his mother desperately summoned her fighters only to be interrupted by a single swing of the lance. Blood spewed high in the air, staining the roof of their hut. She collapsed to the ground like a puppet being cut off from the manipulations of its master.

“Mom!” he charged forward, forcing himself to ignore the pain that seared on his knees.

It wasn’t over. He still had his sister alive. If he could save her, then maybe things would be a little better. The thought pushed him on as his feet pounded the ground harder and harder. But with the crippling pain biting on his knees, the landing of his foot gave way once more. He stumbled, using the picture of his sister in his head as a reminder. No way would he give up just yet.

He rose to his feet but this time with great difficulty. His senses started to dull on him as the sensation overloaded his system. There was every indication that he was about to give up when he noticed a black haired double pony tailed girl came rushing towards him.

“Vanros!” she shouted at his direction.

“Maroma!” he seized her as he toppled over from the desensitized legs. “We need to escape somehow.”

“You’re injured…” fear trickled out of her voice.

“I’m fine,” he forced himself up when everything in front of him dimmed. He looked up, staring right back at the shiny armored figure. All color drained from his face. He reached out for his dagger when it swung its spear across his chest.

“Brother!” he heard her desperate cry as he fell flat on the ground.

He fought against the heavy cloak of death, ignoring the blood staining his shirt as he lunged his dagger right into its abdomen. It ought to work, but only for a moment. He grabbed Maroma’s hand, running away as far as his legs could carry him when the armored figure stood right before him.

“Damn,” he mumbled as he loosened the movements on his hands and legs. “Come on. I’ll take you on.”

“Fighting me bare-handed?” the armored figure scoffed. “You’ve got guts to stand up to me in that kind of condition.”

“Klavier, Vanros Klavier is my name. You’d better remember this because you’re going down by my hand later if now’s not the time.”

Just as it swung its spear towards him, Maroma pushed him aside, raising her arms across as she took the hit directly. The world crashed down on him. The one that he fought so hard to protect crumpled to the ground, never to stand up again. Her eyes were devoid of life and the blood spilled like water flowing out of a burst tank.

“Maroma…” he mumbled as he rested his arms on the corpse.

Why did it do that? That was the question stuck in his mind as the tune ground to a halt. His vision was all watery and foggy when the completed track broke the illusion. He wiped on his eyes, staring back at a slightly wet long sleeve. It definitely was not fun reminding himself of all those moments but he somehow knew that his thoughts about his family was what kept him alive no matter how cruel the world was.

“What are you?” Seria asked as he stood up. “How are you able to paint such a terrifying picture in our heads so easily?”

“I’ve got my moves,” Agent One shrugged. “So, shall we collaborate?”

“I’m still considering…” her answer raised eyebrows among the band members.

“Seria,” Karl said. “I’m sure he has done more than enough to prove his skill.”

“It’s fine, Karl,” Agent One said as he packed up. “Best not to force her if she doesn’t want. I’ll just look for another group. In that case, thank you for your time,” he bowed as he took his leave.

“Wait!” Seria’s voice grounded him on the spot. “I didn’t say you can go.”

The tips of his lips lifted upwards as he turned the opposite direction.

“We’ll take you in, but you better deliver the same kind of performance on the actual day or else you’re dead meat!”

He raised both eyebrows as the band group roused in applause.

“You’d better be here the first thing in the morning,” Seria shouted as he pushed the door open. “I won’t tolerate late-comers!”

“I heard you. So don’t worry.”