Seria’s leadership was undeniable. She was able to command the entire band without having to use fear as most other leaders that Klavier knew would. However, she was often quite unreasonable with her orders, going as far as spending the entire day in the room with little or no breaks in between the varying sessions. But such a trait was already predicted since Karl warned him of this before he signed up for the collaboration. She hated being ill-prepared for anything and would do everything in her power to avoid that trap.

On the day of the school festival, all but Klavier was ready for the event. He didn’t have the formal wear that Seria required him to be in, adding to the headache that he already had since he was on low budget in the first place. Then again, Karl saved him once more, allowing him to borrow one of his tuxedo suits along with a plain red tie and a set of gold cuffs to be worn on the wrist.

Darkness enveloped the sky as day gave way to night. The crowd was starting to amass in the auditorium, turning on the pressure on the small group of performers. Not all were comfortable at the idea of being watched. Klavier spent more of his time cleaning up his own physical image, using it as an excuse to his panicking subconscious to calm down. A little bit of preparations for the presentation wouldn’t hurt, after all.

“Psst, Klavier,” he heard someone whisper right behind him. “Over here!”

He turned around, staring right back at a set of giant red eyes with a half-black, half-white sclera.

“Waah!” he bounced away. “Too close! Too close!”

“Oh! I’m sorry!”

“Zellha, can you not startle me like that?”

“Sorry!” she grinned. “I just wanted to tell you, go out there and do well, okay?”

“Thanks.”

“While you and your friends are distracting them, I’ll go and sell my lemonades. I bet it’ll be a hit.”

“Just don’t do anything funny, please. I’m already in enough trouble.”

“No worries,” she winked as she hopped away, turning heads as she moved past the others.

“Okay guys,” Seria rounded them up. “Today’s the night. We’re going to show them who we’re made of!”

“But captain,” one of the members said. “It’s my first time in front of so many people…”

“Deal with it!”

“But…”

“Good evening ladies and gentlemen,” the emcee’s voice boomed over the speakers outside.

“Get in position!” Seria whispered loudly as the group scattered. “You’re first, Klavier. Go pull a leg.”

“Sure.”

“...without a further ado,” the emcee said. “Let us welcome the school band!”

It was like he stepped through a shroud - the light beamed down on him wherever he went the moment he stepped out of the backstage. He could see almost nobody in front of him; all he heard was their small chatter before they entered into a welcoming applause. He bowed briefly at them before he took his position on the grand piano that dominated the stage space.

He pressed down the first note, digging into the memories when he first summoned both Michele and Zellha. It wasn’t as smooth as he wished it to be, but it was perfectly fine with him since they eventually got along. The introductory piece seemed to be doing its work; the atmosphere in the auditorium started to lighten up as the song yawned into completion.

The audience clapped non-stop as he stood up from his seat. Klavier turned to Seria, using a nod as a cue for her to bring in the rest of the band members. The lights dimmed so much that he could barely see his own hands. They moved in quietly, ensuring that their steps did not disrupt the already lightened mood that Klavier had established from before.

With the snap of someone’s fingers, the lights went back on, this time, revealing the entire stage filled with people holding different instruments, arranged according to the instrument they were holding on. Seria raised her hands slightly, prompting the entire band into ‘ready’ position. Klavier took his seat once more, looking right back at Seria as she swung the conductor’s wand.

“One, two, three,” Seria mumbled as he watched the wand carefully before unleashing a set of notes in a medium-fast pace.

Seria shifted her attention to the rest of the band, prompting them of their time as they mixed into the initially plain music. Klavier’s mind involuntarily wandered into the moments that they practiced so hard that almost all of them dropped sleeping when the practice was over. Tonight was the night. All their pain and thrill poured out into the single piece of combined effort as they took the audience into a parallel universe.

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It became the talk of the night. The band was overwhelmed with praises from the public on their revolutionary performance since it steered away from the classical themes that many were familiar with. The one that received the most attention was Seria since she was the leader of the group. It was disappointing, but at the same time, relieving for Klavier. Disappointing because Seria took credit for his ideas even though he knew it was unintended; Relieving because he wasn’t comfortable talking to a large group about the concept on his own.

He walked out of the auditorium, unable to ignore his stomach that grumbled non-stop even before the concert started. Just beyond the school facilities was a set of night stalls lined up in two neat rows. People roamed around wearing their yukata, making him look a bit out of place with his tuxedo suit. He ignored the gleeful stares that bored down on him, buying a box of four takoyaki from one of the food stalls. He bit on it, the myriad of flavors melting on his tongue when a blue-haired man wearing a similar suit approached him.

“Hey there, popular guy,” he grinned.

“Hey Karl,” Klavier said. “What brings you here?”

“I wanted to tell you that you just made Seria cry,” he said with a grim expression worn.

“What?”

“It’s like what I said.”

“Why would she do that in the first place?”

“Because it’s the first time in her life as a band member that the auditorium was so full that there’s a demand for an encore. People are willing to pay double the amount for it.”

“Really?”

“It’s that good.”

“But I was just doing it to clear my debt. Then again, I wouldn’t be surprised if she gets the teacher-in-charge to pull me over.”

“You’re not the only reason that it’s so successful. The girl wearing a black dress, she sold amazing lemonades too. Though it cost me like fifty thousand zel to buy one…”

“That’s good to hear. What?! Fifty thousand?”

“Yeah. But I can handle the pinch. It’s really good.”

*He just got conned big time*, Klavier’s subconscious sneered.

“Hey Klavier! I’m back!” Zellha returned with thirteen fully-filled pouches of coins stashed on her miniskirt. “Oh, hey, Karl.”

“Hey,” Karl waved. “Wait. You’re that girl who sold me those lemonades.”

“Yeah. I’m easy to find, aren’t I?”

“With those horns, I guess so. They look very much like cosplay material to me,” Karl yanked it only for Zellha to return a bite on his hand.

“Whoa, watch it,” Klavier said. “She gets a bit sensitive when it comes to those.”

Zellha maintained her glare even as Karl apologized.

“Um,” Klavier stared at the pouches dangling on her skirt. “You should keep those somewhere safe.”

“You’re in my way, twerp,” Michele said, shoving Karl aside. “Klavier, there you are. I was looking for you.”

“I was a bit hungry. Sorry for not telling you earlier.”

“Oh?” Zellha stared at her red lips. “You’ve got a good lipstick there.”

“Crap. I forgot to wipe it off,” Michele pulled out a tissue.

“That looks good on you,” Klavier commented. “Of course, you need not wear it when in battle.”

“So how did it go?” Michele asked.

“I managed to pay back eighty percent of the damage repairs straight.”

“Wow!” the three exclaimed. “That alone with that much?”

“Yeah. The tickets were sold out. Each one of them cost like one hundred thousand zel and there were, well, hundreds of them.”

“So what about the money we gathered?” Michele and Zellha asked in sync.

“It’s still four million to pay back. So how much did you guys made?”

“Um, one million zel?” Michele said.

“O-One million?!” Karl’s jaws hung open. “Isn’t that a bit too much?”

“You can never have too much gold,” Michele smirked. “So, what about you, Zellha?”

“Five million zel *and* seventeen gems,” she grinned at the moment when Michele’s smile turned upside down.

“Fine, fine! Don’t give that look! I lost okay?”

“It’s not a competition of who gets more, you guys,” Klavier said. “So, how do we split the money…?”

“I’ll pay the rest. So both Michele and I will have a million to ourselves,” Zellha suggested.

“So I worked so hard for naught?” Michele placed her hands on her hips.

“Not exactly. You can buy lots of souvenirs before you head back with that kind of money,” Zellha said. “Oh, take these gems,” she handed over five of them to Klavier. “I’m sure you’ll find it useful. I got to go now. Kajah’s going to find trouble if I stay here for too long. Ta-ta!”

“Who’s Kajah?” Michele asked as they watched her rush back to the dark corners of the school.

“Her boyfriend, I suppose,” Klavier shrugged.

“What a bother. You’re really okay with not taking the money?”

“Yeah. Why? You don’t look too happy.”

“I-I’m not,” she blushed. “It’s just…”

“Shall we take a walk? Karl, is the ice cream stall still open?”

“It is, though it’s going to close soon.”

“What’s an ice cream?” Michele shot an inquiring look. “You’re not going to poison me now, eh?”

“What have I ever done to make you think like that?” Klavier slid back as she leaned forward.

“I was just taking precautions,” she folded her arms.

Klavier sighed, giving way to a long period of silence.

“Hey, Klavier,” Michele said, breaking the silence before it got any more awkward.

“Hmm?”

“What do you think of Zellha?”

“A little difficult to control, especially in her tendencies to trick people. Why’d you ask?”

“Just a bit curious.”

“Two chocolate cone ice cream please,” Klavier told the vendor.

“Why’d you buy two?” Michele dug her hands in her pockets.

“Because one is for you? Go on, take it.”

She stared at it like she was scanning for any poison inside it. Apparently the visual precaution didn’t work - she went on to sniff on it.

“Hey, I told you already there’s no poison,” Klavier said, shoving aside the daggers poking his back as the public watched them.

“You’d better be telling the truth,” she munched on it like she was eating bread. He hunched forward, staring at Michele as she struggled to cope with the sudden discomfort that punched her head.

“Take it easy man! It’s meant to be eaten slowly.”

“You should have told me earlier,” she said with her mouth still full.

It certainly felt a bit off since it was their first time watching the stars twinkle under the night sky. But it was nice for a change - their thoughts far from conflict and fear that the battlefield was always full of. Would Michele yearn for this kind of peace? He turned to her, their eyes meeting for a split second before they broke contact.

“It feels a bit weird,” Michele said. “Being away from battle that is. And… “

“And?”

“That you’re treating me to this. I mean, this is the first time someone actually did this so I’ve got no idea how to act.”

“Just be yourself. There’s really no need to put on a facade to impress another person. You’d hate it if I pretend to be someone else, right?”

“Still,” her cheeks reddened slightly. “It’s been a while since I felt this.”

“Now you know why I don’t like fighting,” he leaned against the ledge. “Because when you fight, you don’t have the time or space to think about the things that really counts. If the gods are not so held up in trying to get more power, the world would be a much better place, don’t you think so?”

“Your way of thinking is really odd, I’ll give you that.”

“Are you okay with that?”

“Okay with what?”

“With your master’s way of leading.”

“I still hate that part of you for being soft. You almost tore into two fighting Zellha with in that tattered condition of yours. And yet you still hugged her as if it’s nothing. I-I don’t get it. It hurts a lot more than when I get cut by a sword just thinking about that…”

She was like a jealous kid seeking assurance from her parents. Maybe she was since he paid a lot of attention to Zellha just to make sure Zellha didn’t do anything stupid. But with only so much attention he could give, it could get a bit difficult to spread it out evenly. Now was the time - he wrapped his arms around her, shouldering the weight that pulled her down for a while already.

“Sorry,” Klavier said.

“F-For what?”

“For not being there when you need my support.”

“It’s no biggie,” she puffed her cheeks. “Can you let go of me already? We’re getting those funny stares from the public.”

“Fine.”