**Chapter 10: Secluded interview**

Events have unfolded in a manner more favorable than I had initially anticipated.

Following the incident where I assumed the responsibilities of Marvos's sovereignty for a day, the paperwork has been efficiently processed, with minimal need for intervention, except in special cases.

Consequently, Marvos can now attend to his duties unhindered and has ample time for leisurely pursuits, such as strolling, reading, or engaging in private contemplation.

However, there is one aspect I had not fully accounted for.

the extended periods of solitude. With his reduced official engagements, Marvos's interactions with others have dwindled significantly. This has led to a foul mood prevailing over him, coupled with a growing sense of restlessness and an increasing lapse into despondency.

The monarch, it seems, has lost interest in matters of governance and finds himself grappling with the monotony of his eternal existence. After partaking of my blood and experiencing a rejuvenation of his youth, the burdens of the crown, once temporarily alleviated, have begun to weigh upon him anew.

It is a human idiosyncrasy that I find challenging to comprehend – the contradictory nature of their emotions and affiliations. The inefficacy of advancing age to be valued as a source of contentment puzzles me.

Hence, I have embarked upon an extensive search within the Royal Library, seeking to uncover any documentation related to human moods and work ethics. My aim is to discover a solution that will help sustain my contractor's mental well-being for at least a year, following his consumption of my blood.

"Have you managed to locate the information you seek, Your Holiness?" inquires the librarian attendant – a man whose appearance reflects the advanced stages of human life. It appears that youth is a rarity within the confines of this castle, and humans have devised means to segregate the young from the elderly.

"I have yet to find any books pertaining to 'contentment' or 'work ethic.' Could they be stored in a different section?" I responded with an inquiry.

The Royal Library harbors an unusual contraption within the northern section. This device appears to inscribe events that have transpired, are currently unfolding, and those that are yet to come. It functions as a form of clairvoyance, drawing from the insights of hermits and archmages.

Regrettably, the future it foresees is confined to a rather narrow scope. Nonetheless, it is imperative to exercise caution when tampering with the fabric of time, as any mishap could result in a rupture within the space-time continuum.

"Contentment? Work ethic? If I may be so bold, Your Holiness, are these issues ailing His Majesty?" the attendant inquires, astutely deducing the source of my concerns.

"Your deduction is correct," I acknowledge. "I find it disheartening to witness our king in such a despondent state, particularly after the restoration of his youth. Lately, I have overheard him uttering words of despair when he believes himself to be alone. Hence, I am conducting research in search of a remedy for these peculiar afflictions."

"Ah, I see," the attendant responds, understanding the gravity of the situation. "In that case, I would recommend engaging in conversation with His Majesty to address the aforementioned ailments."

This prompts me to wonder about the nature of such conversations. As my knowledge regarding human interests is rather limited, I contemplate offering counsel based on wisdom, hoping to alleviate His Majesty's emotional distress and imbue him with a renewed sense of purpose.

"I appreciate your suggestion. I shall go and attend to him using the method you proposed," I bid farewell to the librarian attendant, expressing gratitude for his assistance.

Walking through the grand hallway, the dim light filtering through the glass windows turns this place into a somewhat confining space. Two beings akin to solitary birds, experiencing loneliness for the same reasons. However, responsibilities beckon, urging me to expedite the process.

Knocking on the door, my mind remains blank, unsure of what I should say or avoid saying. The conversation could easily veer into accusations or take a wrong turn. Yet, my body refuses to concentrate on the impending meeting. What is preventing me from engaging in normal discourse with this mortal?

*["Bring an end to me, as you've pledged to grant me a serene demise!"]*

The memory of conversing with someone outside the garden, the only being I could genuinely understand, departed this world without a shred of dignity. However, let's consider this as more than just a heart-to-heart talk. My emotions will not carry the same weight as before.

"Marvos, are you free? There is something I need your attention for," I say upon entering the unlocked door. Marvos is seated at a table, staring at a blank piece of paper, engrossed in his thoughts.

Books, neatly arranged by genres and timely relevance, form brown lines on the shelves. A small table acts as a center for repose, and there's a musical device playing a somewhat eerie song—no words, just a combination of noises intertwined into a set of musical notes.

"Please take a seat, Lord Mikhail. I shall instruct the servants to brew some tea for you to enjoy," Marvos acknowledges my presence and command as the voice spreads beyond the door. The maids promptly prepare jasmine tea with a hint of nutmeg powder, replacing sugar with honey for a more refined flavor.

The tea is piping hot, and while the combination of nutmeg and honey creates a discordant note, it is not entirely unpleasant. Still, I would have preferred sugar. Marvos, on the other hand, seems to appreciate the unconventional blend.

"I am all ears for your wisdom; share it as you please," he says, finishing his cup in a single gulp. Isn't tea supposed to be savored slowly, allowing each sip to be appreciated?

"Does something bother you, Marvos?" I inquire.

"I beg your pardon?" The question startles him, causing his cup to crash to the ground.

"I have heard countless times that you have been conversing with yourself. Does your sanity remain intact after drinking my blood?" I remind him of those moments, fabricating the claim. If my blood were indeed driving him to insanity, he would not be this composed but in a perpetual state of madness.

"I cannot recall such instances. Can you enlighten me as to when you heard me converse with myself?" He denies any knowledge of such events.

"Yesterday at dusk, something about the famine of Retuial. It wasn't a monologue; you were answering questions you had previously posed." I offer proof of the conversation, asserting that the dialogues he has with himself are not mere soliloquies but interactions between two facets of the same being.

"I see you have caught a glimpse of my ramblings. My apologies for subjecting you to such a sight," Marvos admits, a bit flustered.

"Tell me about those thoughts," I urge him. If these are the concerns afflicting him, then a sympathetic ear and understanding might be more comforting than internal dialogues.

"Tell me exactly what you seek, Lord Mikhail?" He continues to feign ignorance.

"Those thoughts—sorrows and ideals. I am interested in them. Your views influence the kingdom I protect," I express my sincerity. The words may sound grand, but I hope to extract honest answers rather than prophetic monologues.

"These are but trivial matters. I would not dare waste your time on such things, Lord Mikhail," Marvos sighs.

"Marvos, do you know what I detest the most? Ignorance. Every piece of information, no matter how trivial, constitutes knowledge," I express my frustration. The distortion of virtue, such as humility, into belittlement, is particularly vexing.

"My apologies. Once again, I failed to grasp the wisdom in your words. Very well, then, this is my heart and soul," he says apologetically, beginning his confession.

The conversation stretches from noon to dusk, extending beyond the moon's presence in the quiet sky. The time spent with him proves to be delightful, a vast sea of topics keeping me engaged. Foreign affairs, magical theories, agricultural theses, the morals of humanity, and trade commerce, to name a few.

His thoughts are not aimless ramblings but opinions and discussions on various topics. Within the castle, where even the most knowledgeable hermits may not respond or comment on all his musings, he finds himself alone in his pursuit of knowledge.

Asking for insights from none but oneself is inherently lonely. I empathize with his fate as a reader of thousands of pages. Perhaps that's why he is drawn to Darwen, as the only source of enjoyment rather than conversing with oneself.

"It has been quite a lengthy conversation. I hope you don't mind the ramblings of a fool, Lord Mikhail," Marvos expresses his gratitude before retiring. Despite the reduced workload and physical enhancements, he must still adhere to the rule of self-preservation.

"The exchange of knowledge has been pleasant. Do not belittle yourself due to a lack of audience," I offer my final words before departing.

We part ways as midnight approaches, and I find this moment to be quite enjoyable. If time were to freeze, I wish it would be at this moment. Such a vain wish, hoping to avoid this weakness again. As the day of judgment looms, even shared joy does not escape the shadow of sins.

**The end**

**Careless words upon the sea,**

**Hope to avoid recipient's glee.**

**Silent receiver, no judgment to share,**

**Sound travels, an unspoken affair.**